

A Ross Island Chronicles chronology

Lessons from a harsh continent



Son, Christmas isn't about getting presents. It's about peace on Earth and getting along with each other.



How many crab legs can we get for this chick?



by Chico

Hatching an idea

When I was first approached by Val Carroll, friend and publisher, about doing a cartoon for The Antarctic Sun, I saw it as an opportunity to do something that I have always dreamed of doing. And that is to do a cartoon strip for a newspaper. I know it's not the New York Times but the way I looked at it, in order to climb any mountain you have to take the first step up it.

I never would have imagined that first step would have been in Antarctica, especially getting the opportunity to be a part of such a congenial publication. I have been fortunate and blessed to have been asked to continue to do the strip ever since. This opportunity has let me give hope to my dream of someday getting syndicated. For this I am very thankful to Val and all the staff members from year one to the present for the encouragement, and for never complaining all the times I sent cartoons in past deadline. In Antarctica you find out quickly about deadlines and that there is always a real one that usually means when you actually do it or get it (you should have never told me the real deadline).

The inspirations for my style have come from "The Far Side," "Bloom County" and my favorite, "Calvin and Hobbes." I get a kick out of the irreverent styles and humor that the creators of those comic strips have.

During its first year, The Antarctic Sun didn't come out that much and three years later its evolution has seen it now getting circulated weekly. The first year was also rough. I used magic markers and regular pencils. I have now graduated to pens.

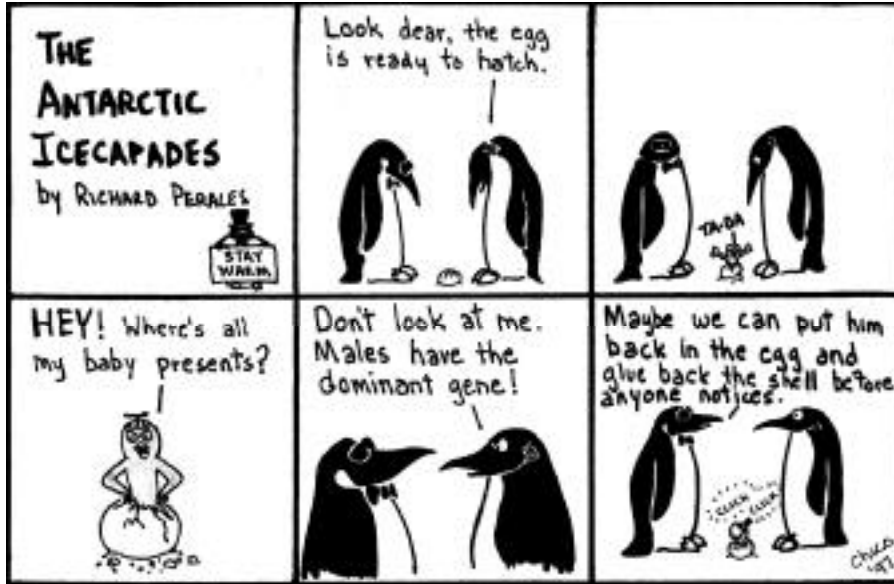
The idea of using penguins was easy. The Emperor penguins give out an aura of dignity and charm that is hard to improve on. They carry themselves with debonair style. Through time I focused on the modern nuclear family, a father, mother and a chick.

Most of my ideas for the cartoon strips have come from what I've seen or heard here. Living and working in Antarctica, it can be tough at times. I've seen myself and many of my friends and co-workers go through tough times here. In the end, all I ever wanted to accomplish was to make someone laugh and hoped it made their day a little better by it.

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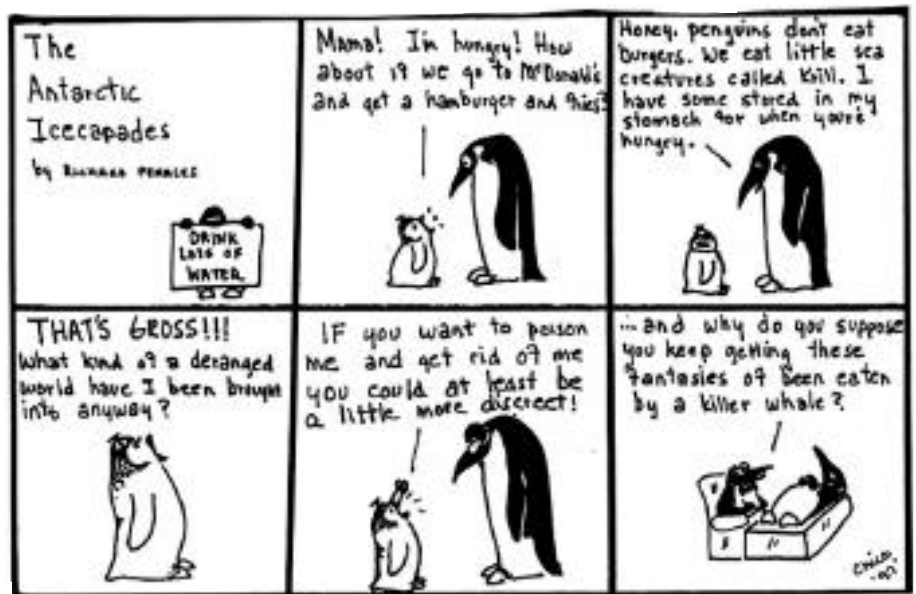
the debut

1997-1998



On the inception of *The Antarctic Sun* in the 1997-98 summer season, I used a baby chick as an analogy for the birth of the paper. The chick's character and personality came from a combination of myself and my brothers (all seven of them) when we were kids, with some help from nephews, nieces and friends' kids. Most of us when we look back at growing up probably questioned everything and probably didn't realize we were doing anything wrong, when in fact we were probably driving our parents crazy.

This cartoon strip came to me when I thought about what my brothers and myself put my mother through while growing up and wondering how she didn't go crazy in the process. I have a daughter, Candice, who was a good kid growing up. Her mother raised her and did a better job than I ever could have. My daughter is my toughest critic because she is so honest with me, sometimes not giving me any compassion. She gave me two thumbs up and I knew I was on the right track. In the cartoon strip, once again the son reminded me of some of the things I said and put my parents through.



There are two schools of thought about how penguins got their names:
One is because of their fatness; the other is due to their white heads

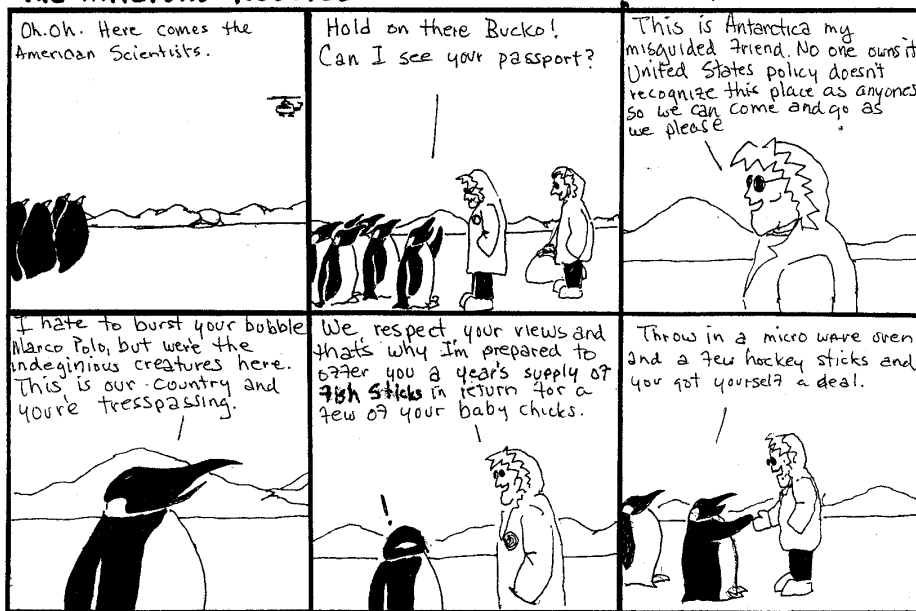
**Did you
know?**

I have a good friend who is a marine molecular biologist. He and his wife are the ones who discovered the glycoproteins that Antarctic fish have that help keep their cells from crystallizing and freezing and who has been coming down for more than 40 years. His name is Art DeVries and he is seen as an institution here. He and his team catch these giant cods from great depths in the ocean for their research studies. After they pull the fish out of the holes out on the sea ice, they put them in these large aquatic tanks in order to keep them alive longer. One day there was an octopus that had been caught and was in one of the tanks. Everyone was excited and went down to the aquarium where the tanks were located to take a look. I wondered what would have happened if a penguin had been in the crowd since penguins love seafood.



The Antarctic Escapades

by Richard Perates

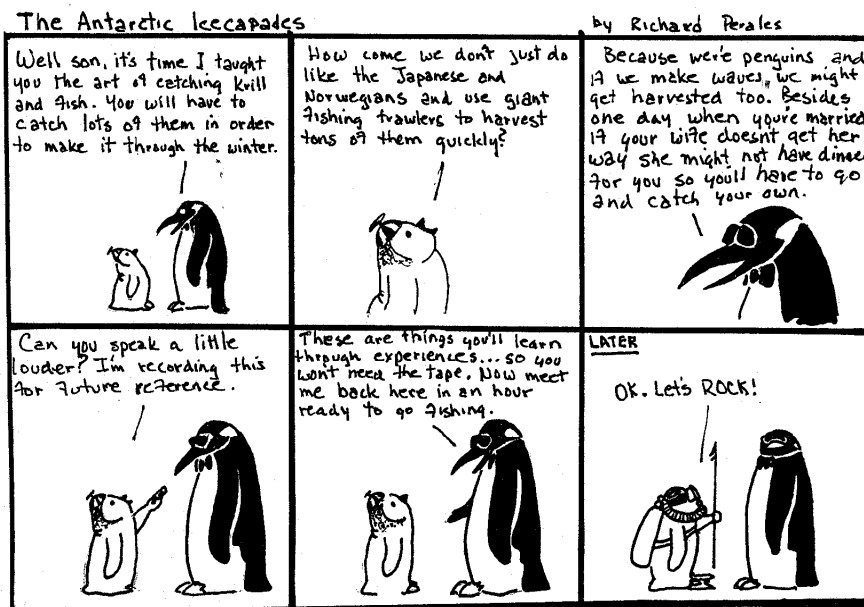


This cartoon saw a phase I went through where I was wrestling with which way I wanted to go with my style of drawing. Editorializing, trying to be cute, cynical, or satirical. Antarctica itself answered that for me. After being here for a while you can't help but wonder if anyone should be here at all. I also see here that once you give people a little bit of technology the next year they want more. We see it all the time at the field camps. The cynical ending was a way of showing how modern technology can be seductive to even those with noble intentions.

Did you know?

In 1928 the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition endeavored to "test the effect of music on penguins," but were unable to do so because the only instrument they brought on the voyage was the bagpipes.

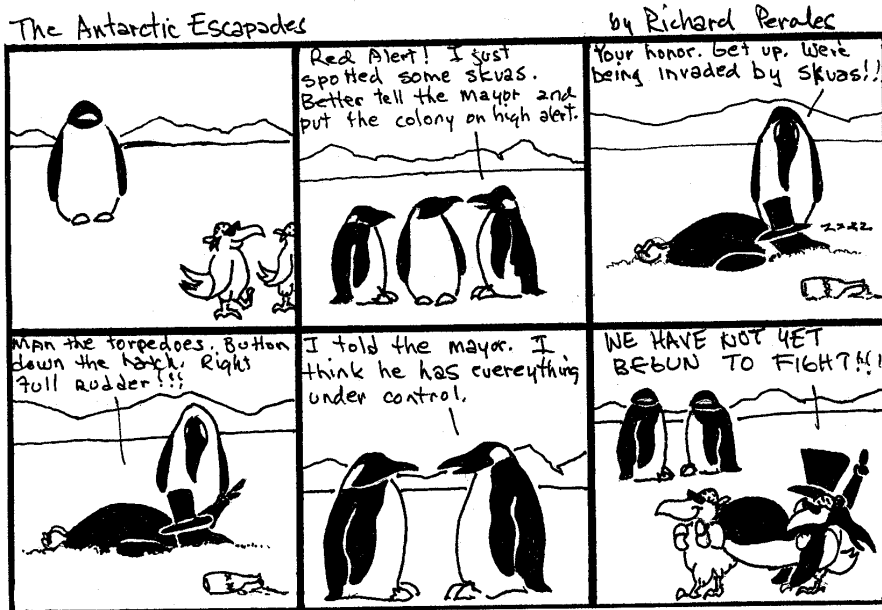
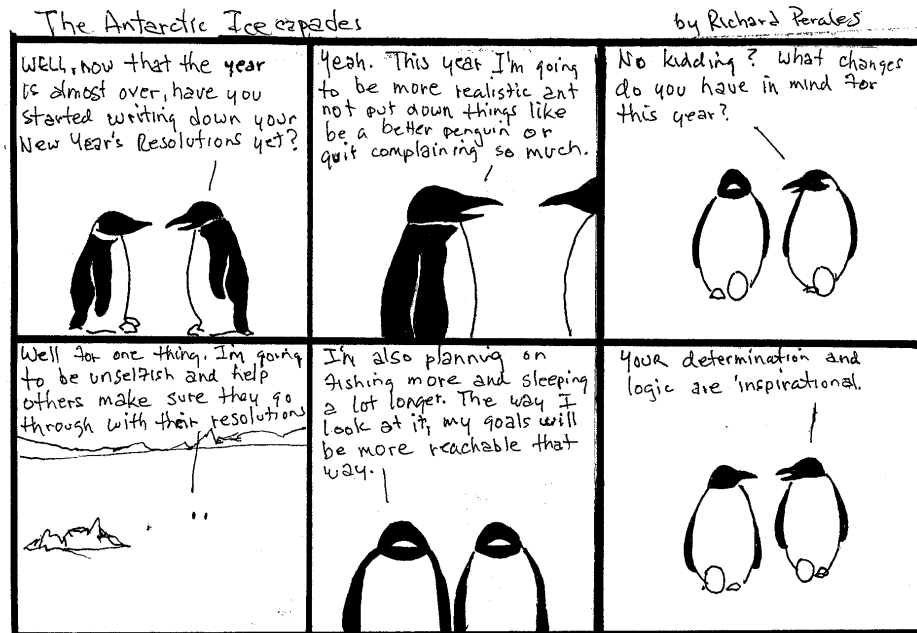
I thought it would be funny to be irreverent and do this since people down here would never think of grabbing a penguin and flinging it. Seriously, though, I bet they would go far.



Penguins evolved from the same ancestral stock as the Albatrosses, the supreme masters of flight.

Did you know?

The last cartoon strip of 1997 was about the future. I am a firm believer that everyone should take the time at the end of each year to look back at themselves and where they are heading. Thinking about my New Year's Resolutions and writing them down, I quickly saw how it was easier to put some down that I knew I was kidding myself with because they were contrary to what I wanted to achieve.

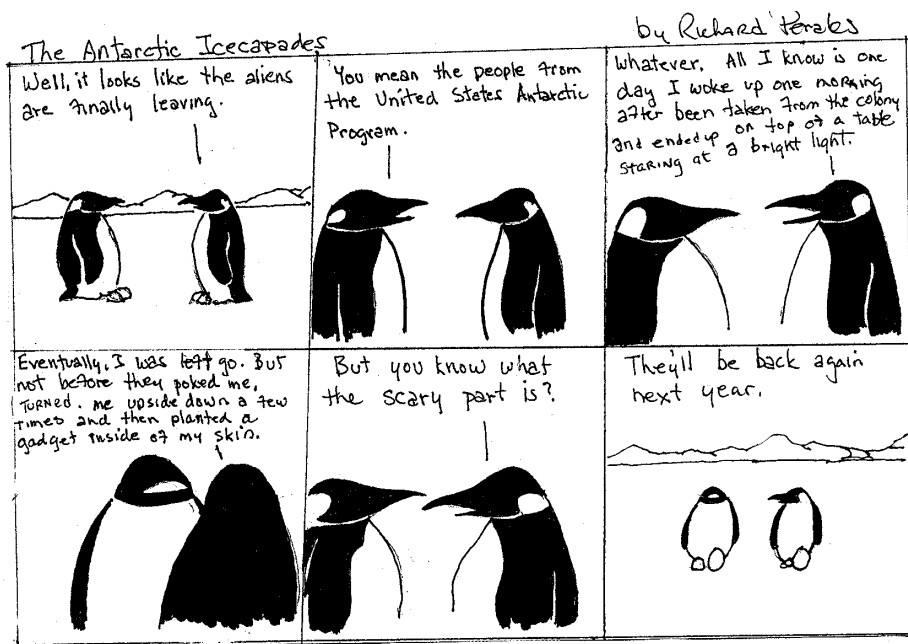


When I first started coming to Antarctica drinking was a big way to pass the time, due to the limited number of constructive things to do after work. It still is, but on a lot smaller scale. The idea behind this cartoon was a way to reflect this. The mayor, as I called the main penguin here, represents McMurdo.

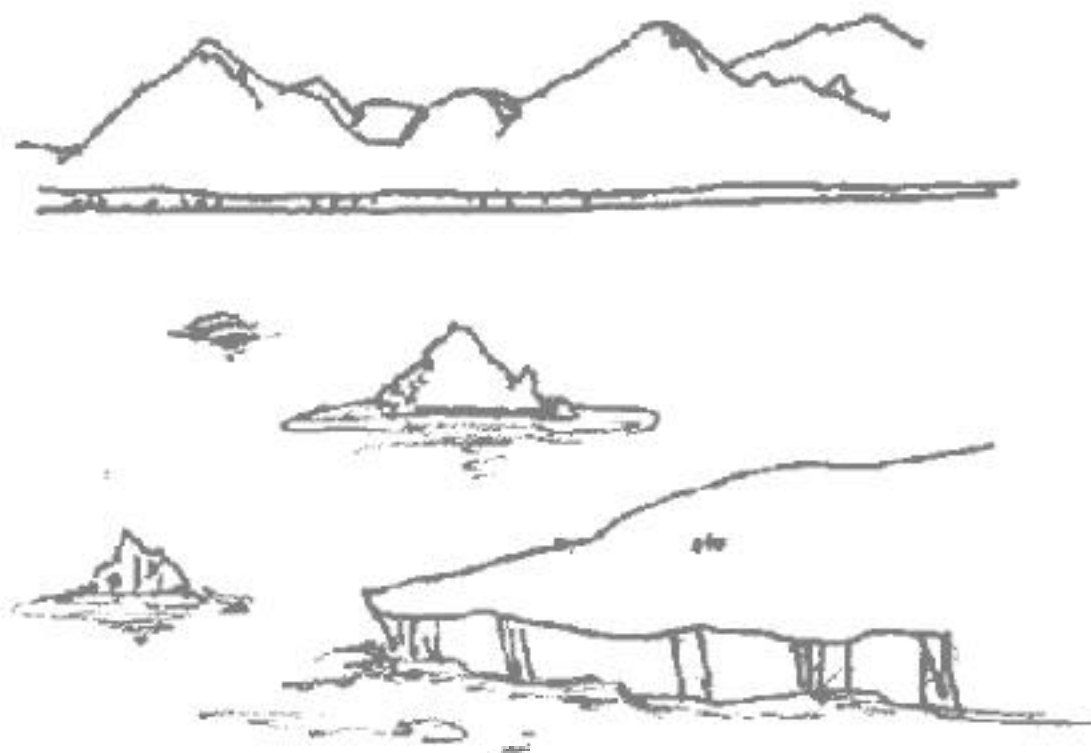
Say
what?

"Penguins are no clowns, no funny waiters, no beautiful black-and-white puppets. They are a bunch of aggressive, narrow-minded, filthy, stinking, pathetic creatures beating the hell out of each other."

- Albert Beintema



In the last issue of the season, I wanted to reflect in my cartoon strip that the season was over. In this cartoon I wanted to show what the penguins might say if they could speak after having seen humans for the first time in their lives and then having seen them move in on top of that.

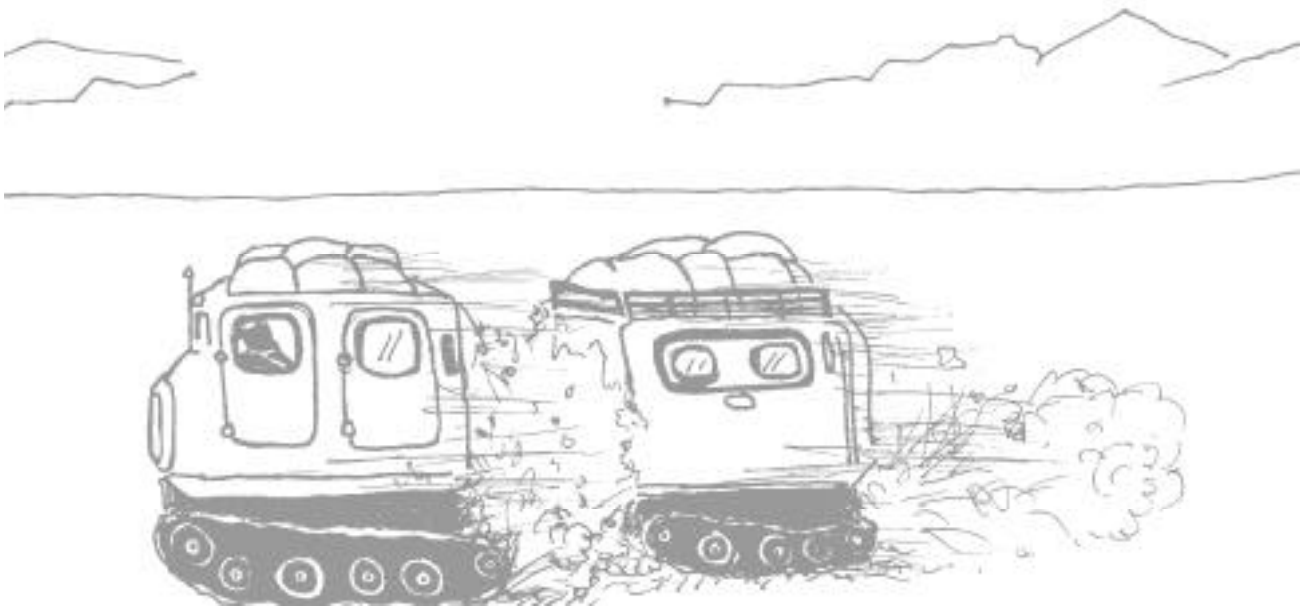


The deepest dive recorded for a penguin is 1,772 feet for 18 minutes. Typically they dive less than 60 feet deep for a few minutes at a time.

Did you know?

The year that wasn't

Chico spent the beginning of the 1998-99 austral summer at Palmer Station, so he wasn't around to draw cartoons when the Sun began publishing that year. The interlude lasted throughout the season.



a name change

1999-2000

Ross Island Chronicles by Richard Perales



Great! Maybe we can barter some things with the Americans.



I just saw the first plane. It looks like the start of the Antarctic summer season.



How many crab legs can we get for this chick?



For the first issue of the 1998-99 paper I decided to change the name of my cartoon strip from "Antarctic Icecapades" to "Ross Island Chronicles." I've always struggled with what to call it. Once again on the first issue I decided to focus with what happens when you come to Antarctica for the first time which, for McMurdo and South Pole stations, it's after arriving in a plane.

Halloween was always one of my favorite holidays and cartoon strips to do. The baby penguin wearing a rabbit's outfit still makes me laugh because I can still remember some of the crazy costumes I saw when I was growing up. You wondered what planet they came from.

Ross Island Chronicles by Richard Perales



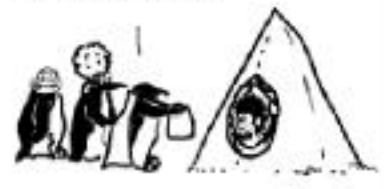
Let's go to MacTown to see what we can get.



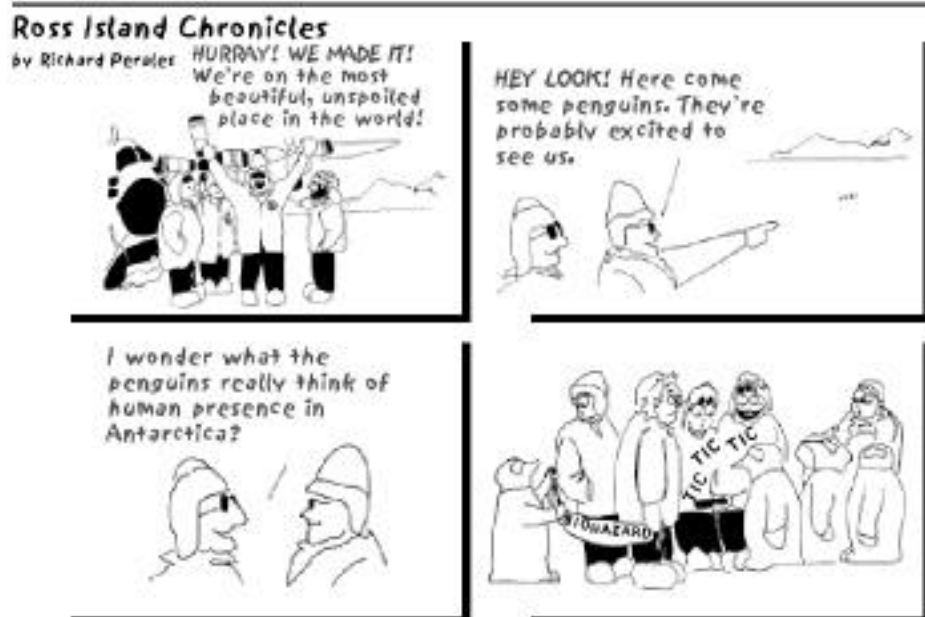
Looks like Halloween is here.



TRICK OR TREAT!



Once again one evening after work I went fishing with the molecular biologist team. Late in the season they had this guy from Denmark join their team who had been in the Arctic doing research as well. He had seen the Inuits use this technique called a glider that uses a metal shaped like a glider with lots of hooks and bait to "swim" through the water. Even Art, who has probably seen it all, had never seen this fishing technique before and was impressed. We went out and caught some massive "cod" that day. Unfortunately my drawing pen ran out of ink and I was forced to use a felt magic marker. Times were hard.



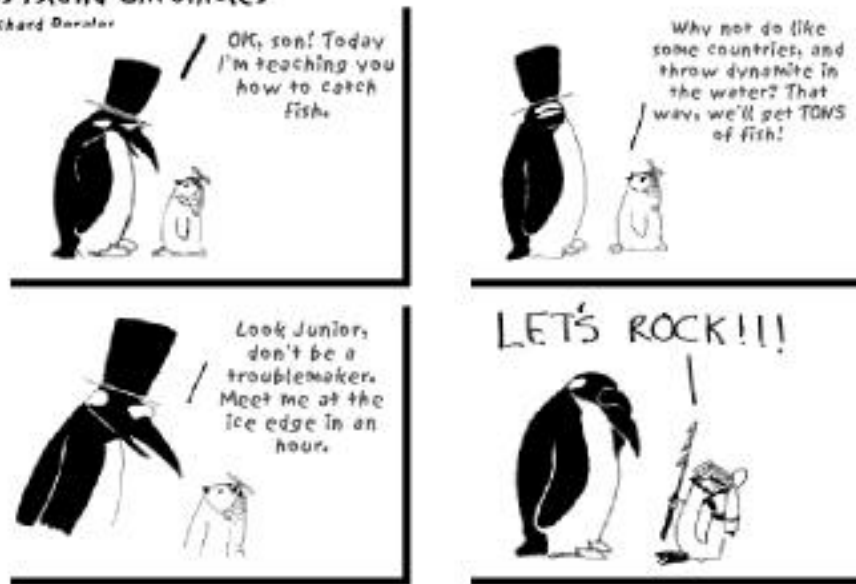
All of us working and living here in Antarctica who come back the next year do so for many reasons, but mainly because it's an amazingly incredible place with lots of great people working in it. It's truly one of the last great unexploited places on Earth. Even though the science research conducted here is commendable and I believe in it, as they can have profound results, I can't help wondering if the gains from having man here outweigh the losses. Public relations people say the animals don't mind us, but no one ever asked them what they think. This cartoon strip gave me a chance to express that.

Did you know?

Scientists are commonly referred to as "beakers" on the Ice. The origin is thought to originate from either 1) the term "beaker scum," which refers to algae collected in beakers by scientists in Antarctica, or 2) the character "Beaker" from "The Muppets."

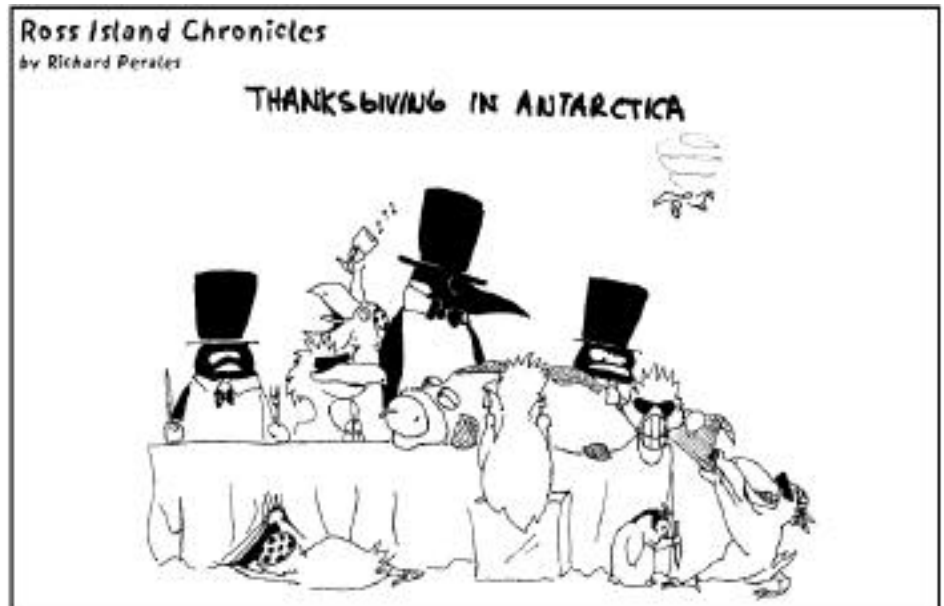
Ross Island Chronicles

by Richard Perales



One of my friends here, Kevin Hoelfing, is a diver who is on Art DeVries' research team. He loves what he does and unselfishly tries to take people that are not with their team out with them because they know people here like to get out as much as possible. I did this with him in mind but wasn't happy with the way the cartoon turned out.

Thanksgiving Day in Antarctica is a big event. Just like in the States except with less drama. I tried to dress penguins as Indians and the scientists as pilgrims, but that didn't work so I settled for a holiday card.



"We've had a cup of coffee, but that's it, and this mouth-watering look at the beautiful roast turkeys is the closest we're going to get."

- Dick Smith in "Our Fantastic Planet," documenting his 1991 trip to the South Pole station, which requires visitors to bring their own supplies

Say
what?

Ross Island Chronicles

by Richard Perales

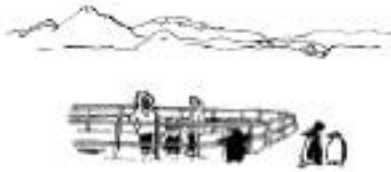
We caught another scientist
for our research studies.



Put him in the holding pen.



Let's see how long he can
hold his breath underwater.



I like to look at the research that is going on with the animals here and look at how things would be if the tables were turned around. The Penguin Ranch is a biologist research camp that is set on the sea ice early in the season when it is a few meters thick. It was christened the Penguin Ranch because of the corral that is used to hold the Emperor penguins while they are being studied. One day I went to the camp and there they were. A platoon of penguins looking as if they had been arrested and awaiting interrogation. I sat there and drew the camp exactly as is, but in my cartoon I stuck Dr. Ponganis, the chief investigator, in it.

My roommate for that year was a good friend of mine from Oklahoma, Brad Hasley. He loves golf to a point that's almost a neurosis. In the summer the recreation department puts on an annual golf tournament with these black balls out on the permanent ice shelf. It takes longer to find the ball than it does anything else. Out on the annual ice the seals open up breathing holes with their canine teeth. I wondered what would happen if the golf tournament was held on the annual ice.

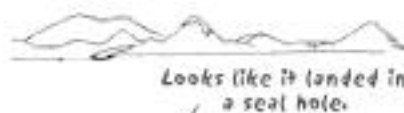
Ross Island Chronicles

by Richard Perales

Great day for a
game of golf.



Nice Shot!!!



Looks like it landed in
a seal hole.

oo

Talk about luck.



**Did you
know?**

Penguins first inhabited the Earth 37 million to 45 million years ago. Some were as tall as six feet. Today they generally range in size from two feet to less than four feet.

Ross Island Chronicles
by Richard Perales



How about for all of mankind to get along?



And what are you asking of Santa this year, my misguided American scientist amigo?



Sorry, you can't ask for the impossible. How about an Antarctic cod with plenty of Omega 3?



Ross Island Chronicles
by Richard Perales

Okay everybody! It's almost time!



Oh no! My watch has stopped!



All right! Who stole the Chinese firecrackers?



Looks like everybody will make it to work tomorrow morning.



The New Year's Day issue was fun to do. One of the things MacTown is infamous for is that no two clocks show the same time. In the building where I work there are six shops and a few other separate offices. You would think they would all be synchronized with the clock where we eat and the ones in top management's office. They're not, so you find out quickly that you're either late or early depending on whose clock you're going by. The idea of the watch stopping was when I wondered what would happen at the New Year's Eve party at a field camp if the only watch available stopped at the wrong time.

Penguins have been trained to stop on command and perform some of the simpler tasks domesticated dogs can do, but aren't capable of much beyond basic Pavlovian training.

**Did you
know?**

This cartoon has always been one of my favorites. One time there was a big hoopla about the meteorites because of the one that was found in Antarctica that researchers said was Martian terrestrial and might contain traces of life there from a long time ago. All of a sudden the meteorologists were under the spotlight when they came that year. This was a way of poking fun at Dr. Ralph Harvey, the principal investigator, who has a reputation for an irreverent sense of humor, which I get a kick out of.

Ross Island Chronicles by Richard Perales

Have you heard? The scientists are here again looking for rocks from Mars.



It's high time we retaliated!



WHAT?! First our chicks and now our beloved rocks!! We have not yet begun to fight!!!



They went Mars... We'll give them Mars.



Did you know?

There are seven fictional feature films in which Antarctica plays a prominent role. Three feature aliens, one a hidden tropical dinosaur refuge and one a post-Apocalyptic world with 858 men and eight women. Two of the other three are described as “dopey comedies.”

Ross Island Chronicles by Richard Perales



In the summer the Antarctic continent is visited by a lot of tourists. The ships are filled with people eager to see the mysteries and beauty of a place rarely seen, with the more accessible locations frequented more often. The people come off the boats like locusts with their cameras in hand, shooting pictures of anything that moves. Especially the animals.

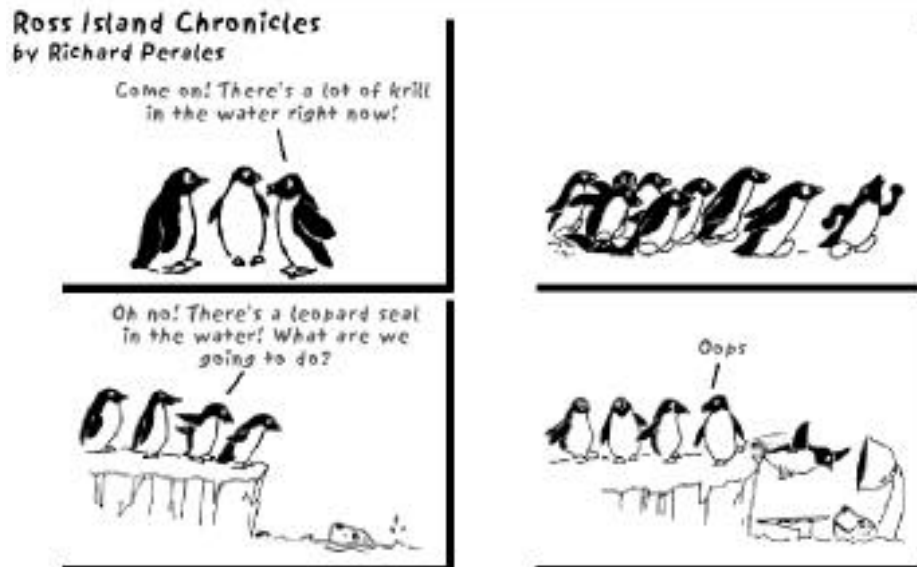
With this cartoon I started to focus more on one of the main characters: A male penguin that could be identified by his top hat. I also started to give him a personality and character developed from a cross-section of my male friends.



A penguin can propel itself seven feet straight out of the water to avoid a whale or leopard seal.

**Did you
know?**

I got the idea for this cartoon from a single-frame one that I had done a while back. Adelies are cute penguins because they are small. I like them - and so do leopard seals.



The last issue of the year was about the last flight taking off. I got the idea from what happened once at the Dry Valleys when the season was ending and camps were being closed down for the summer. The last helo still operating had gone to the Valleys to pick up some people that were completing closing down a camp over there. While the rotors were moving and before it took off the ground, the guy in the back jumped off because he had forgotten something. Since no one else was in the back no one noticed. The helo left, got to McMurdo and then was dismantled. It was later that someone figured the guy had left back at the Dry Valleys. They had to put the helo back together in order to fly back to get him.

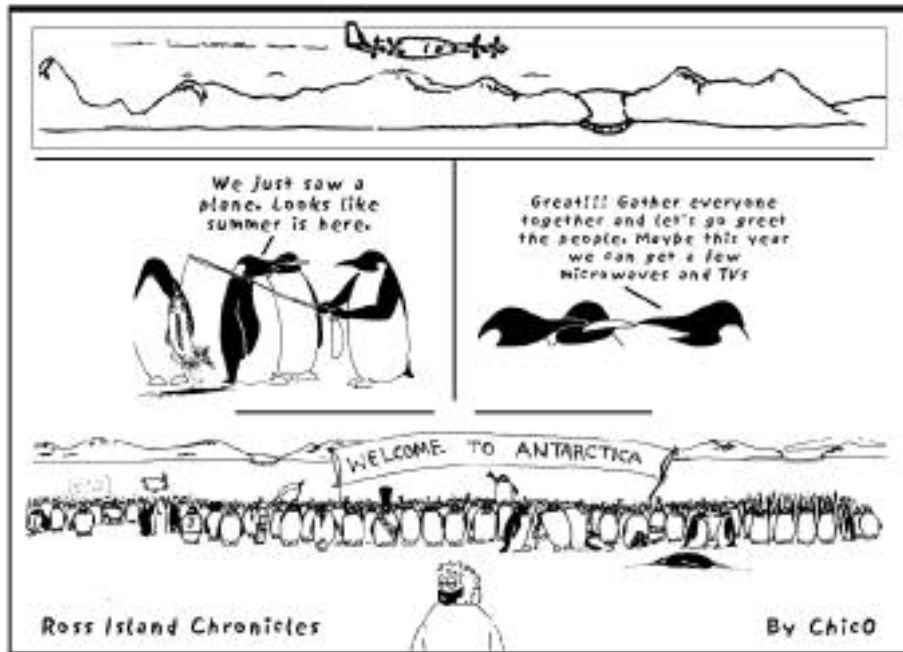
Say
What?

"If you were to construct a set of brand values for the Antarctic from the popular perception of Antarctica now, you'd come up with something like this: cold, lonely, empty, bleak, lifeless, isolated, impenetrable, distant, bad news, inevitable environmental degradation, penguins."

- Kevin Roberts, marketing expert, in a 1998 speech

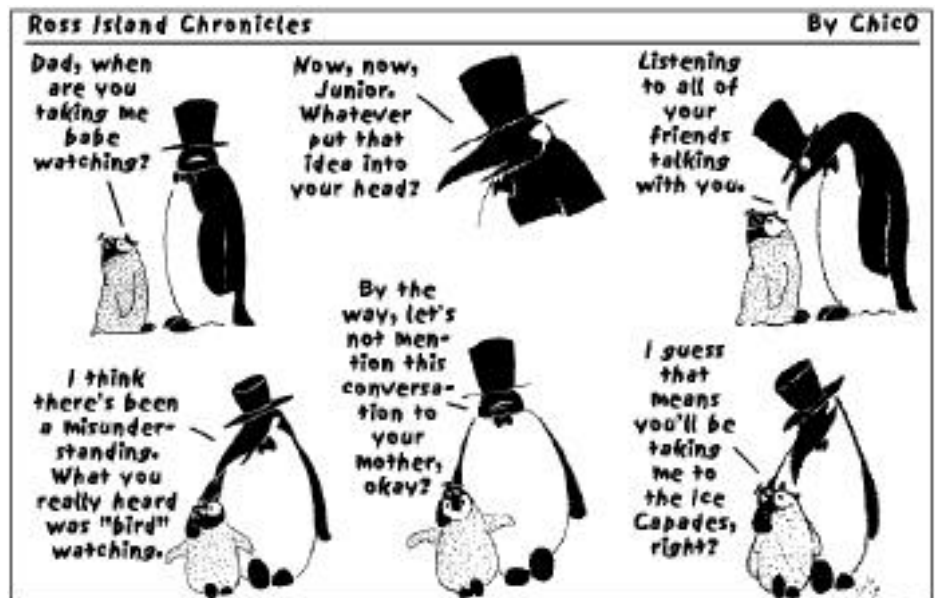
A fridge for the 21st century

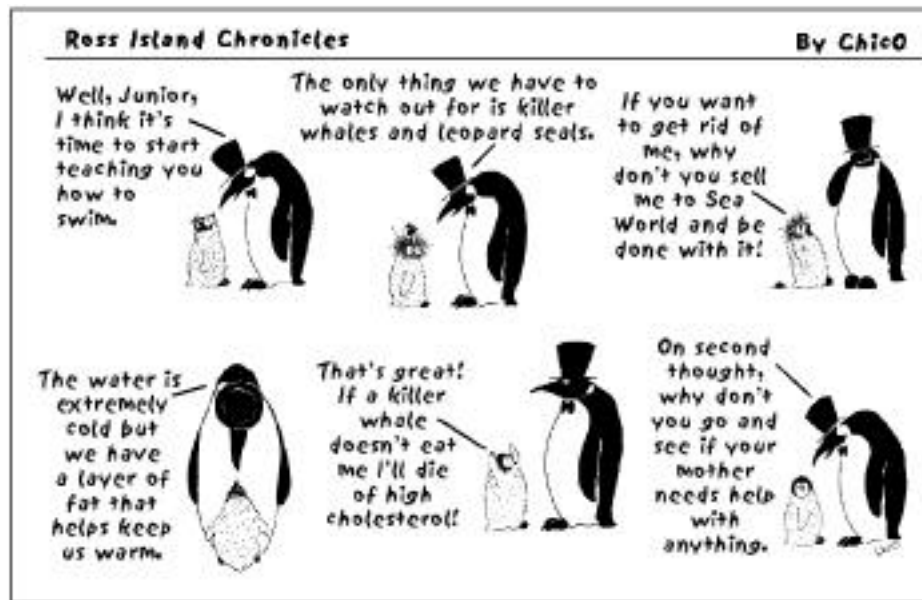
2000-2001



The first issue of the 2000-01 season I wanted to help welcome everybody back for another year, but at the same time remind everyone that someone else was here before we were. Mainly the penguins.

My daughter has a step-brother who was your typical little kid growing up that is so hyper that you wonder if he has sugar for blood. He's one of those kids who's a good kid, but you have to sleep with one eye open because he's always up to something. I also added some of my many brothers' different personalities with the baby Emperor.



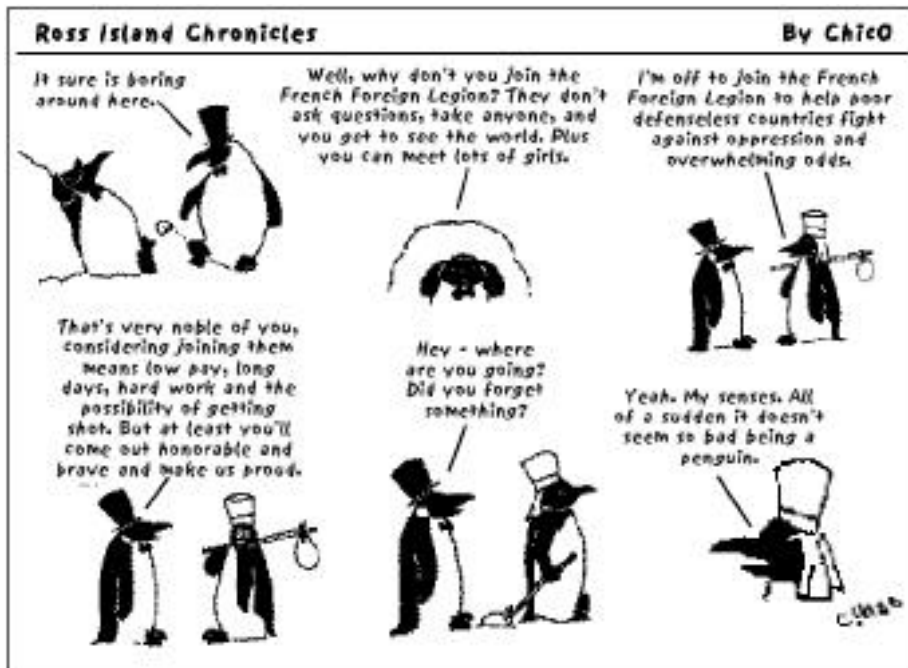


One evening after work I went with my friend, Art DeVries, the marine molecular biologist, and after catching five Mawsonis (or Antarctic cods as we call them) weighing over 90 pounds he was telling me about one time when they caught one that weighed over 250 pounds. It was too big to hold in the fish tanks so they let it go. Looking at the ones we caught that were over five feet long made me wonder how big that monster must have been. The only thing that came to mind was an Orca. That night I drew the cartoon strip.



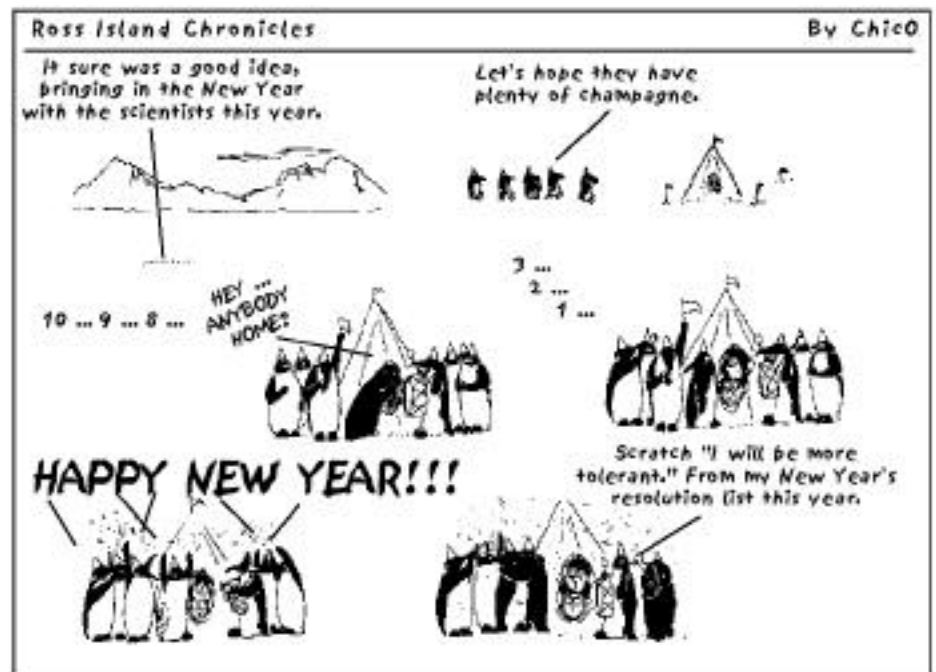
Did you know?

Legend has it there was a day it rained chicken bones at McMurdo Station. They were apparently dropped by skuas as a flock of the scavenging birds raided a food waste bin that wasn't securely covered.



I got the idea for this cartoon while watching an old Humphrey Bogart movie about the French Foreign Legion and recalling a recent conversation I had just had with a person who had just arrived on station and was already complaining about everything without taking the time to look at the bigger picture and appreciate just how easy it is here under the circumstances. This was a way of saying to all those who like to get tough and play chicken by giving ultimatum threats to wake up and smell the roses.

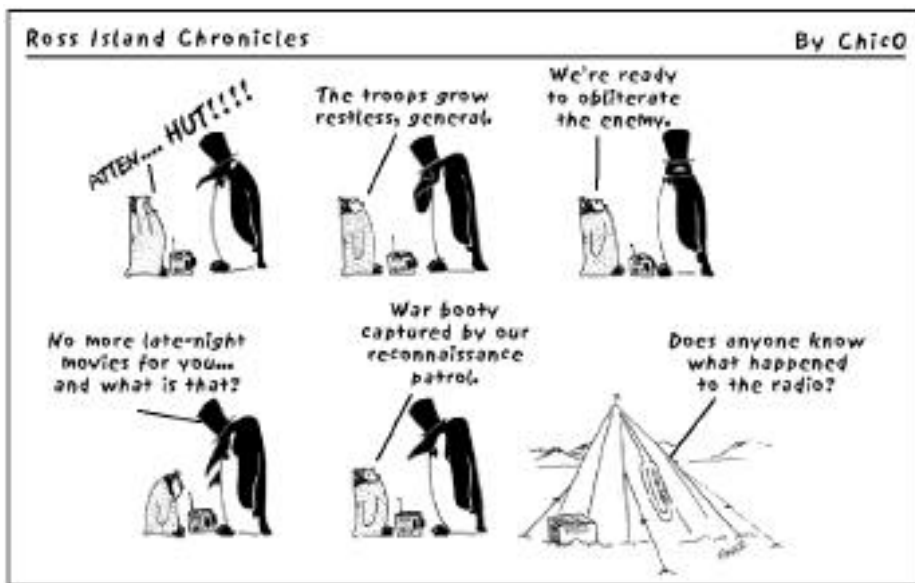
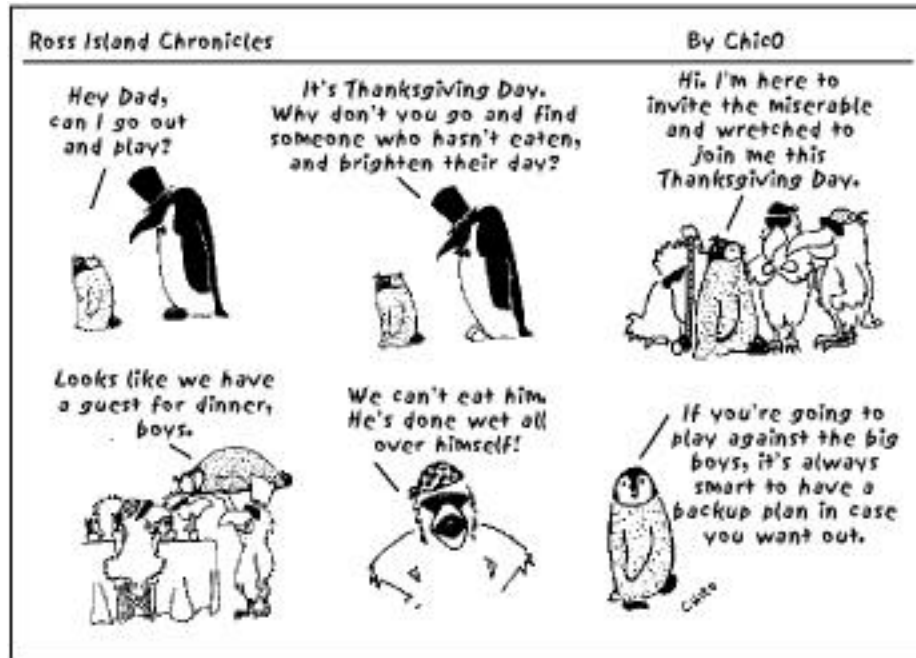
The New Year's issue was fun to do this time around. Once again the antics of Emperor penguins acting like Antarctica is their home was my main focus. I had also given my daughter a big speech that week about the virtues of being patient and tolerance with others. I wanted to show her how sometimes we can be too serious even when there's no need to be.



Penguins have knees. They're well hidden under the feathers.

**Did you
know?**

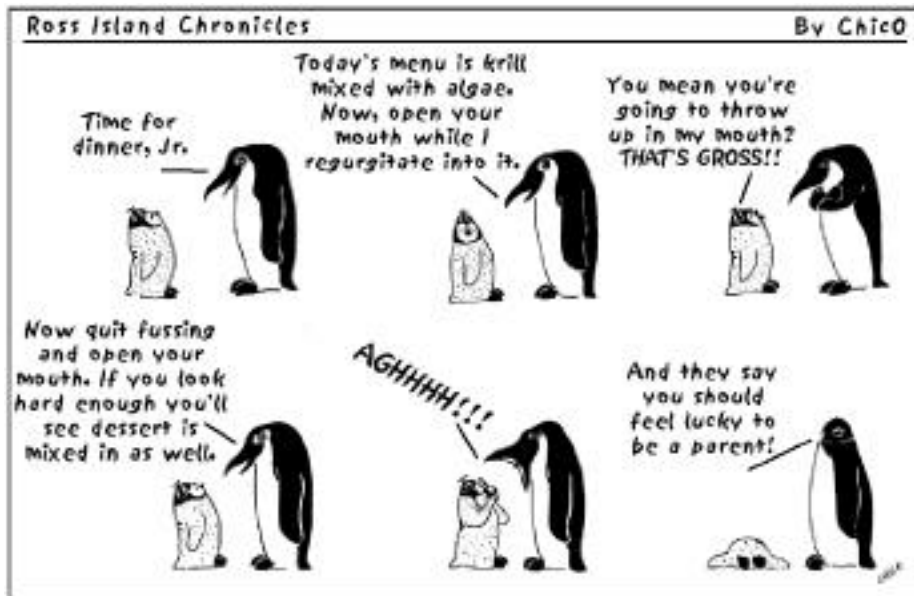
The Great Southern Skua is the Antarctic version of a crow. They are big, powerful and smart. I've always admired them for their tenacity and perseverance, but most because they are fearless. If you walk out with food in your hand and one is around, it'll do what it can to get to it. I was at Cape Crozier on the other side of Ross Island, which has the largest skua colony in the world right next to an Adelie penguin rookery which then numbered 350,000 strong. I saw a skua take off, home in on a baby penguin for whatever reason and hit it with its beak repeatedly for its next meal. The Thanksgiving issue showed even the skuas taking time to be with each other, but a happier ending for the baby penguin.



By this issue I was enjoying drawing the father and son penguins. The little Emperor is portrayed as any small child is ... smarter than most parents give them credit for.

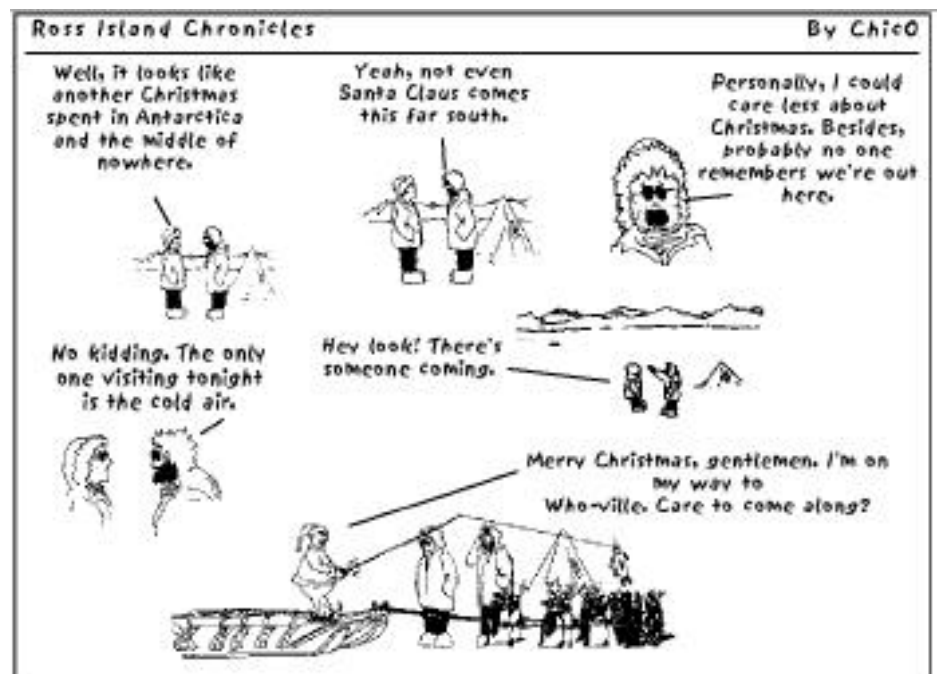
Did you know?

Penguins don't have teeth, since evolution caused birds to lose them over time to reduce weight in order to aid their ability to fly. Of course penguins can't fly, but they evolved from species that do.



One of the main complaints everyone in McMurdo seem to have is the food. I say MacTown because the other two stations have a reputation for good food, as do all the field camps. But in MacTown, where there are a lot more people, the cooks are strapped to satisfy the hunger pains of so many different appetites with an extremely limited fresh food supply. With this cartoon I wanted to say the food could be worse.

I'm not too sure about this cartoon. It was Christmas time and I was missing my daughter and homesick like a lot of people get during the holidays. It's during the holidays that you realize just how far from home you really are. In the middle of the cartoon I had a mental block but had to fill in the last square quickly because of the deadline. It showed and now that I look at it I have no idea why I drew what I did because I don't get it.

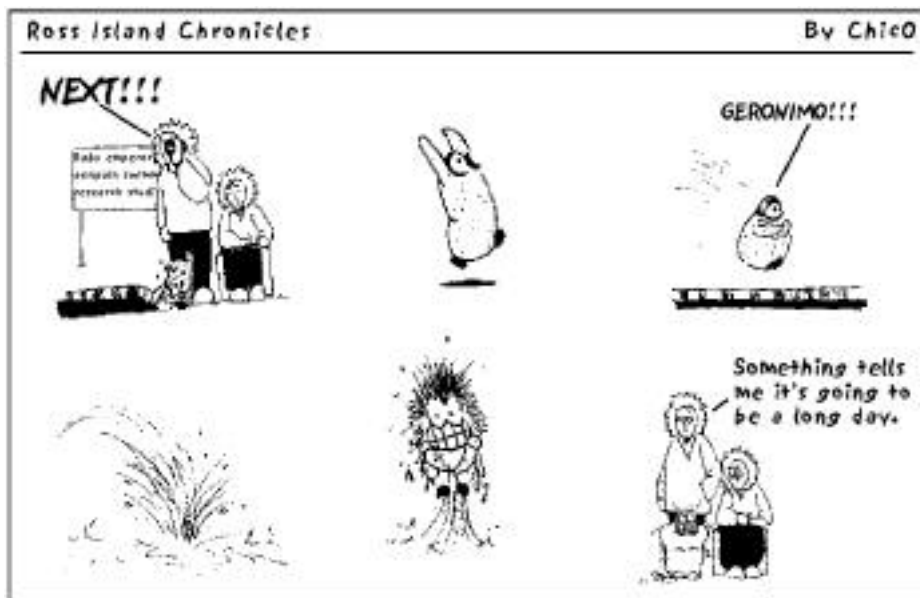
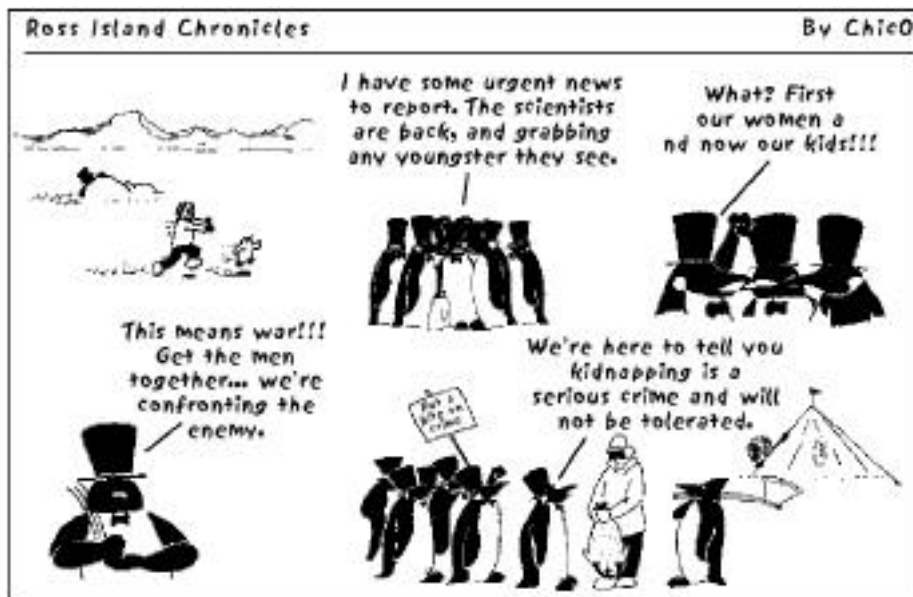


"If it's possible to imagine a piece of beef, odiferous cod fish and a canvas-backed duck roasted together in a pot, with blood and cod-liver oil for sauce, the illustration would be complete."

- Frederick Cook, Antarctic explorer, describing the taste of penguins

Say
what?

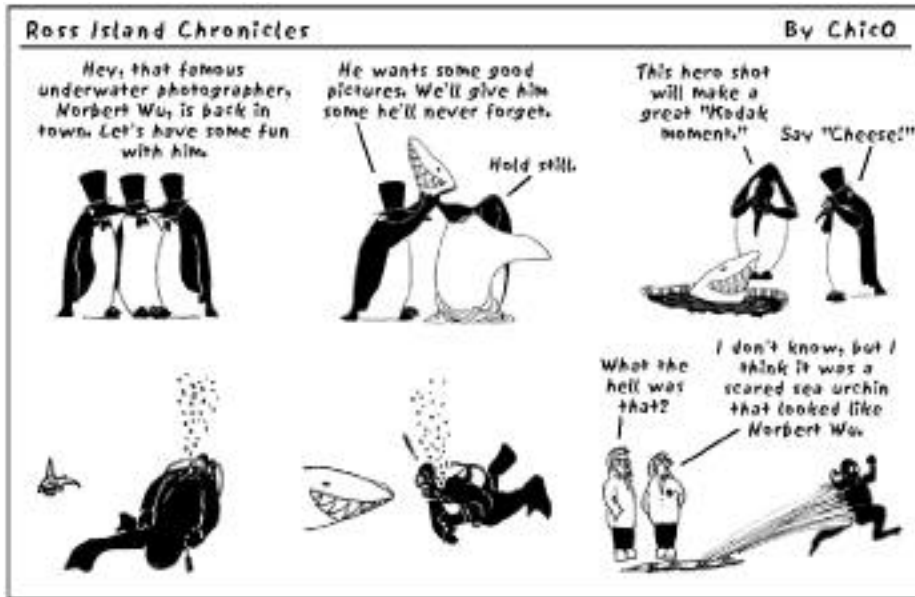
By now the Emperors were real fun to draw. This year another Emperor Penguin Ranch was set up on the permanent ice shelf. This one for adolescent penguins, which not much is known about since the chicks leave early and return as adults. The researchers went to Cape Washington and picked up the young penguins, transporting them via twin-engine plane. In the civilized world if you go take someone else's kid without permission, you have every vigilante group and police agency looking for you. I got carried away by putting in a penguin with an axe. After the issue came out I regretted not having toned it down some.



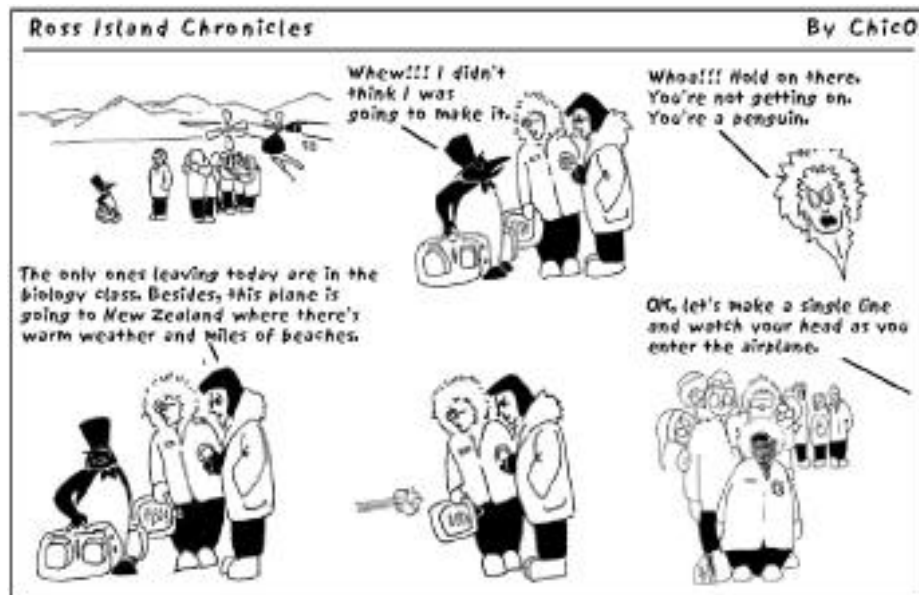
At the Baby Penguin Ranch a trench about 80 feet long and a few feet deep was dug out and then a hole drilled so that seawater would fill it. One of the many different studies done on them was the swimming mechanics and physiology. In the winter here at MacTown we have what we call a mid-winter polar plunge. A hole is drilled on the sea ice and a hut is stationed close to it. You get naked, run to the hole, jump, climb out on a ladder that is fixed from it, and then you scream AND curse as you thaw out while going back to the hut. They say seawater is colder than fresh water. I could never tell because it was all cold to me.

Did you know?

The winning time in the first-ever marathon to the South Pole was 8:52:03 by Richard Donovan of Galway City, Ireland. Donovan and three of the four other runners wore snowshoes for the 26.2-mile race, since the snow was soft enough to sink up to six inches into.

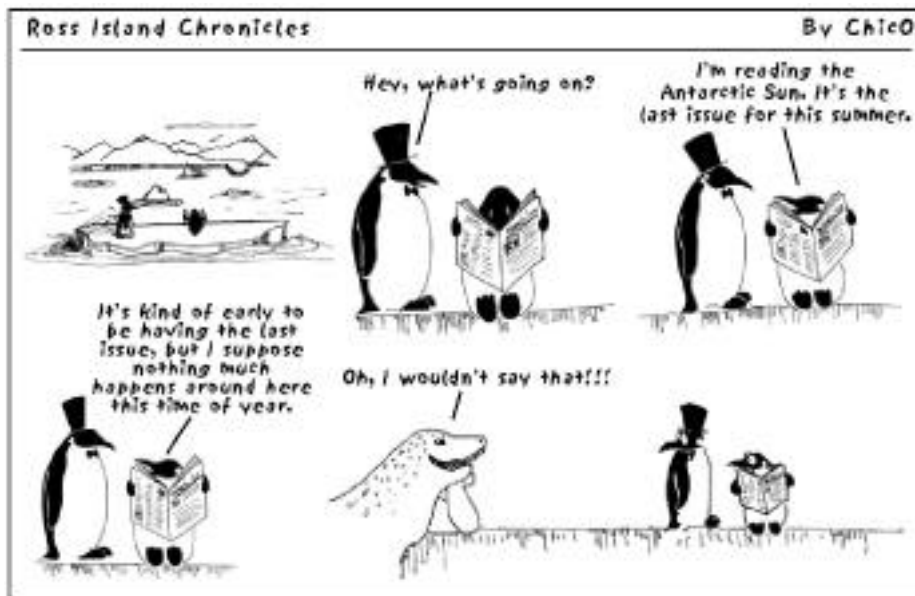


Norbert Wu is an underwater photographer who came down here with a grant with the Writer and Artist's Program that everybody here knew about. This was his third year down here and this time around was photographing the orcas. Killer whales in the Southern Ocean are more aggressive than their northern counterparts. In his lecture he said that he had no idea how they would react to a diver so, not being a fool, he sent his assistant in first. This was a chance to take a good nature crack at him.



Milk is one of the prizes at the South Pole County Fair. Workers in Antarctica live off powdered milk, since it is considerably less heavy and bulky to ship, so the rare container of fresh milk is truly a prize.

Did you know?



Did you know?

No one is exactly sure who was the first man to set foot on Antarctica's mainland, since two leaders of an 1895 expedition - along with a hired crew member who said he jumped over the side of their rowboat to steady it - squabbled about the claim throughout their lives.

A group of women, on the other hand, linked arms to ensure they all arrived at the South Pole together during their 1992 quest to be the first women to reach the bottom of the world over land.

a new look

2001-2002

Ross Island Chronicles

By Chico



The first issue of the season was the Halloween edition. I wanted to get zany this year and do more cartoon strips with the penguins in them. I think drinking too much coffee really affects your brain cells.

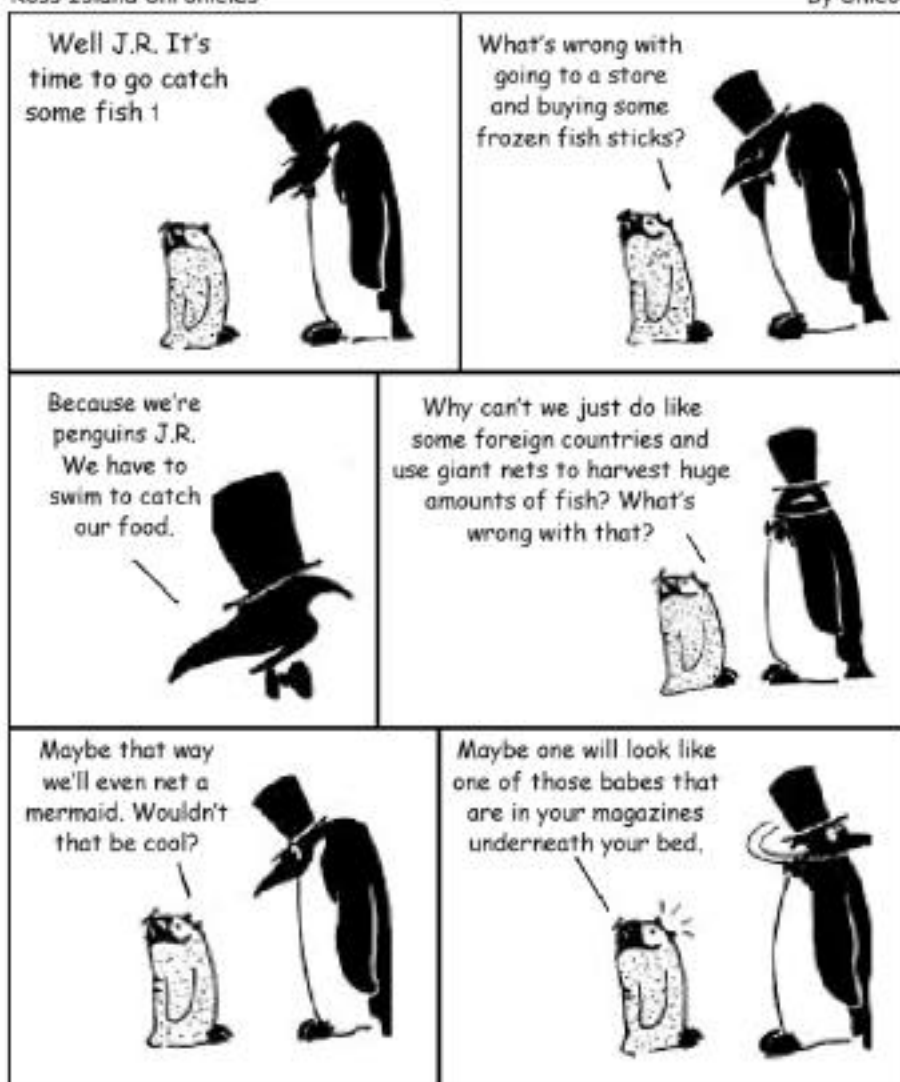
Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Chico has for several years offered in-depth insight about Antarctica while providing lessons in Spanish at his Web site. In addition to detailing the daily happenings of McMurdo Station and other locations on the Ice, he offers a Spanish word and a Spanish phrase of the day. They range from the basics ("basura," meaning "trash") to the bizarre ("Hay tantas camisas verdes aqui que parece una selva." or "There are so many green shirts here that it looks like a forest .") An excerpted collection of his writings is featured in this final chapter.

I really enjoyed drawing the father and son Emperor penguins. Kids are the best gift God can give you. When they are young and innocent you never know what a child is going to say and when.

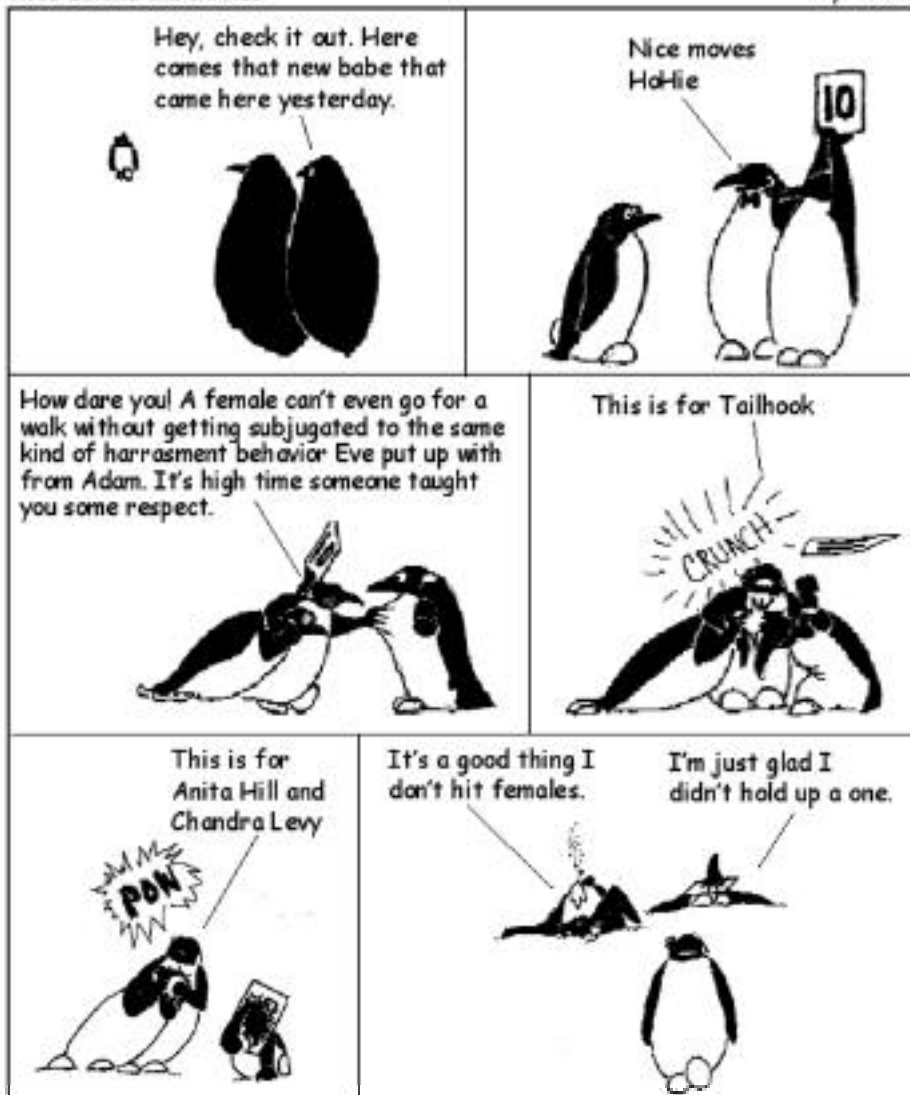


Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



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Nov. 23, 1997: Today's Spanish word of the day is: "Bano (bah-know)." Which means: "Bath." Which we don't have in Antarctica. When we smell worse than the clothes we're wearing and haven't washed in over a month, we take showers. Well some people do anyway. Others just change clothes. Still a few souls acclimatize to the smell and seem to like it that way. If you're at South Pole Station it's two-minute showers twice a week. It really doesn't matter because all the clothes you have to wear down there just to stay warm keeps most of the foul smell in. How many people do you know that can wash their hair in two minutes? At some of the outlying camps you take a shower by using a handcloth and wiping yourself clean. Or you can do like a cat and use your tongue. Antarctica has over 90 percent of the world's fresh water. Problem is that it's frozen. Here in MacTown we pump the water from the sea and use reverse osmosis to remove the salt. Farther away from the sea where there is no water nearby, we use Snow-Melters to...melt the snow. They're big steel boxes with a pipe running along the bottom. The pipe is hooked to a small furnace on the outside of the box which is filled with snow. The furnace is lit, the pipe gets hot and the snow melts. If you want longer showers you put more snow in it. If you want a bubble bath you put in Mr. Bubbles.



There are a lot more females in the Antarctic Program than ever before. They do everything that men do. Some guys still have a problem with that.

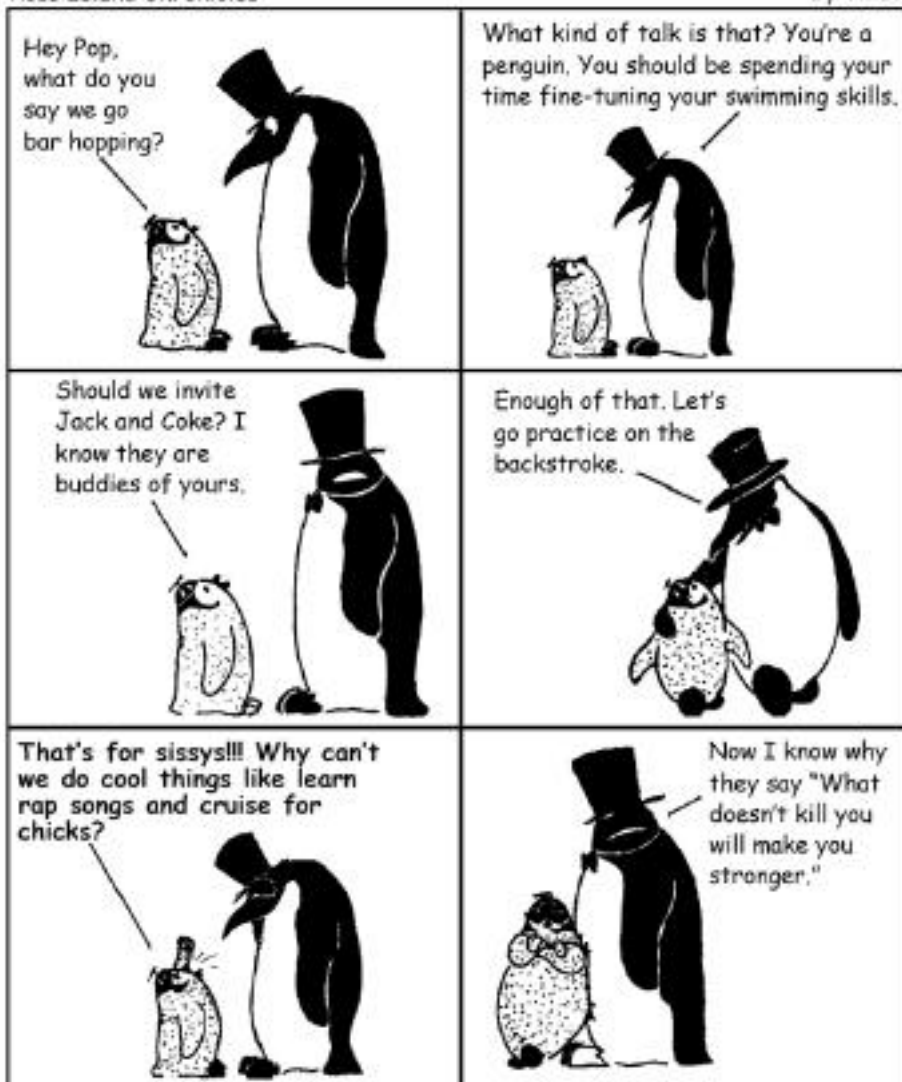
Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Jan. 2, 2001: The Spanish phrase of the day is what you say to the vegetable merchants that you encounter on your travels while on your way home from here...and there will be many of them: "Que es esto? Which means: "What is this?" Because here where fresh vegetables are a rare and prized as the meteorites that are found in the Alan Hills, they are few and far between. If it wasn't for the small greenhouse, if you wanted a green vegetable you would probably have to get a can of paint and go to town on it. Canned fruits and vegetables have become the norm and brought back memories of past glories of the Heroic Age. Prostrate problems are not a high priority here. Neither is fresh fruits and vegetables. If we were horses it would be easy because hay is lighter. But we're not. Soon you can graze on the grasses of New Zealand to your heart's content because soon you WILL be seeing green stuff on your tray.

Many of us who come here have children back home. No matter what age they are, you miss them. This place has a way making you do a lot of thinking. Often at the end of the day when you finally stop, you find yourself thinking about your family and friends. Sometimes you think about the things your children did that made you laugh.



Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Nov. 20, 2001: The Spanish word of the day is: "Nueces (gnu-eh-sehs)." Which means: "Nutz." Nuts, knots, nots. You have to wonder why people do the things they do. Yesterday evening's presentation by Ted Dettmar on the race to the South Pole by the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott in the early part of the century can't help but make you wonder what could inspire grown men to risk life and limb to do the things they did. The Heroic Age, as that brief part of polar history is called, is full of these stories of courage, loyalty, dedication, perseverance, and yes...lunacy. Stories of men traveling for days on low rations even too small for a rat during blinding blizzards, brutal low temperatures and winds that froze your skin as soon as it touched it. Yesterday we heard of the preparations before the final assault to reach the geographic South Pole and the challenges both teams encountered. Of how some of Scott's men with three ponies got stuck on an ice flow that was starting to flow out to sea with orcas in the waters knowing there was a free meal once they flipped it. Of how one man Thomas Creen, volunteered to jump from ice flow to ice flow in order to get to Discovery Hut and some help. He did. The stories are so amazing they almost seem unbelievable. One thing is for certain. You have to be "nutz" to even come here.



The Thanksgiving Day cartoon strip was fun to do because it was out of control. The marine biologists who study the seals have a crazy way of tagging them for identification. They put a bag over the creature's head to not stress them and calm them down some. That's where I got the idea. The baseball bat came from watching the movie "Goodfellas."

Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



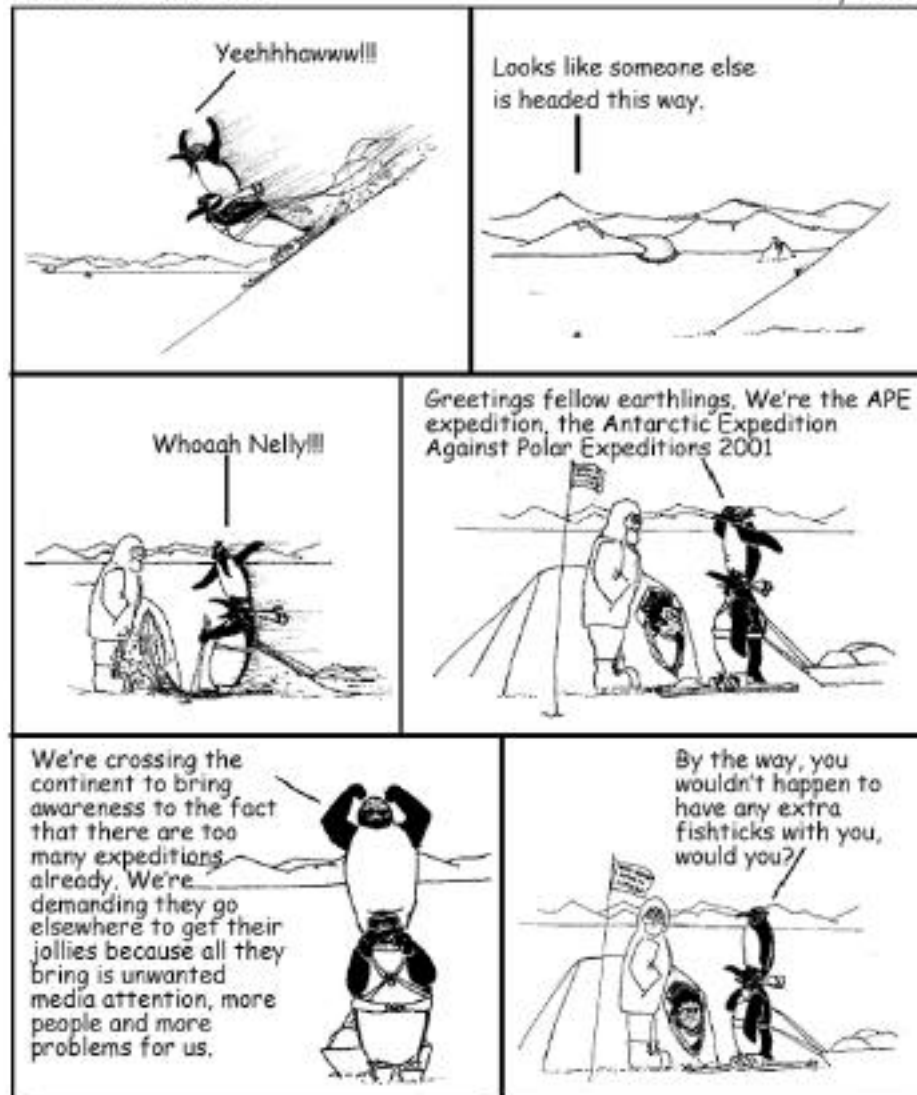
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Nov. 27, 1997: The Spanish phrase of the day is one you might be able to use should one Thanksgiving Day you find yourself surrounded by a brigade of turkeys with attitude problems who think you're there to choose who's going to get beheaded first: "Estoy aqui para salvarlos porque soy Un vegeteranio." Which means: "I'm here to save you because I'm a vegetarian." That kind of rhetoric ought to get you elected to their union. Because an angry turkey is like a runaway truck. No telling how much damage it's going to do. And there's plenty of them in this world. Sometimes turkeys are given authority. That's where the chaos theory was born. If you ever wonder why some of the things you do, you do, it's because somewhere up the line of command a turkey snuck in and gobbled his orders. Turkeys are not only at the top, they can be in the bottom too. You wonder why you tell someone to turn left and then they turn right. It's because you're talking to a turkey and turkeys don't understand English. They understand gobble gobble language. Of course if you try to tell them in that language and someone else passes by and hears you...well you get the picture. This Thanksgiving Day it's payback time. Take a bite out of a turkey. Have a great Thanksgiving Day.

Every year there are a lot of expeditions going to the geographic South Pole. On bicycles, gliders, skis alone, promoting anything that you can think of. The only expedition that hasn't been seen trying to get there are the penguins.

Ross Island Chronicles

By Chico

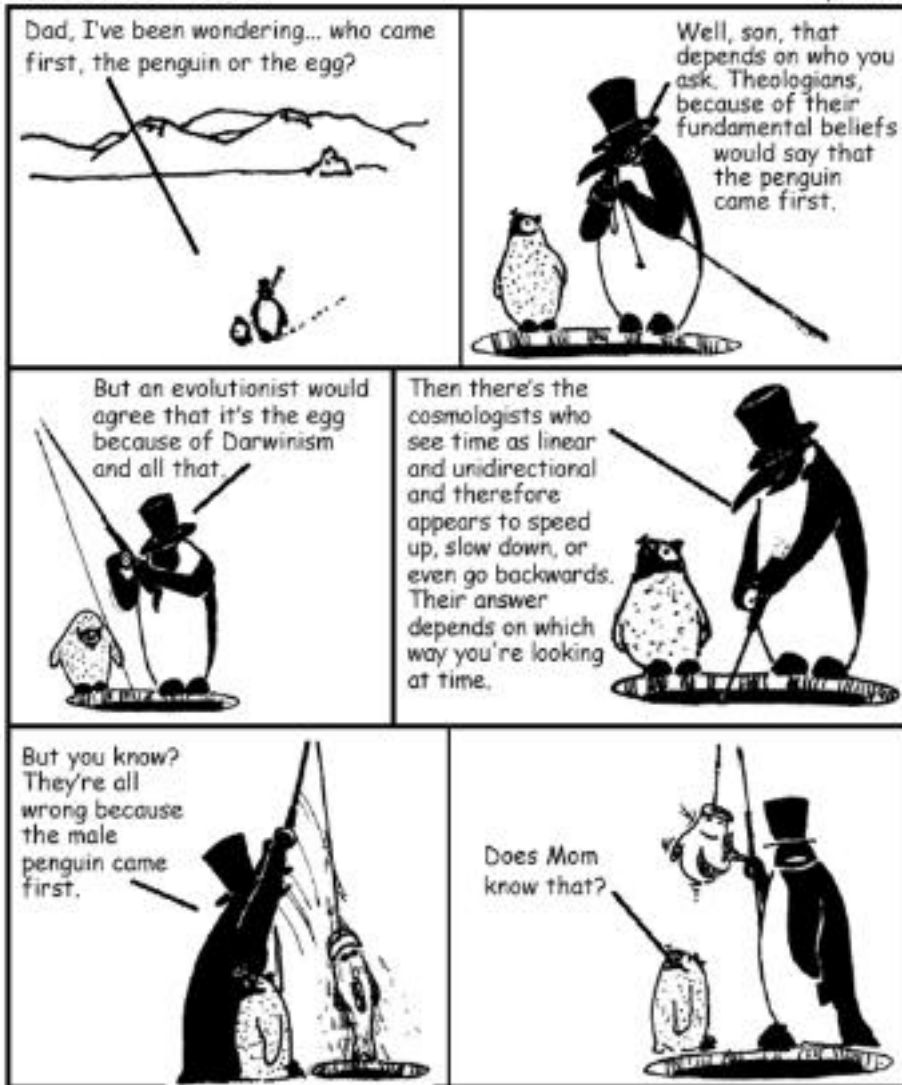


Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



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Dec. 15, 1997: Today's Spanish word of the day is: "Cielo(see-eh-low)." Which means: "Heaven." On days like today when you look toward the sea ice from McMurdo Station all you see is...nothing. It's totally white. Pure white for that matter. No grays, just white. The sky and the ground all blend in so that it looks weird and eerie. You can't tell where one starts or the other one ends. I suppose if you were in Heaven, if there is a Heaven, it would look like that. I don't know, I've never been there. White is the predominant color in Antarctica with Not-So-White right behind. The mountains are covered in snow, the sea around MacTown is frozen and everything else has snow or ice on top of it. If you saw a ghost and turned white you would be safe because the ghost wouldn't be able to see you. But you never see ghosts here in the summer because ghosts are white and thus blend in. Looking at the ground from above it's no wonder it's dangerous flying, whether it's a plane or a bird. Sometimes birds get disoriented trying to figure out where the ground is and crash land. So if that can happen to a bird then you can imagine what a pilot has to deal with. And that's a reminder that next time you go out in a whiteout, if you're not careful you might end up in Heaven sooner than later.



I went to the science lecture on meteorites and it was so fascinating that it made me think about the beginning of time. That's what's cool about this place. There is so much knowledge that it's overwhelming.

Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



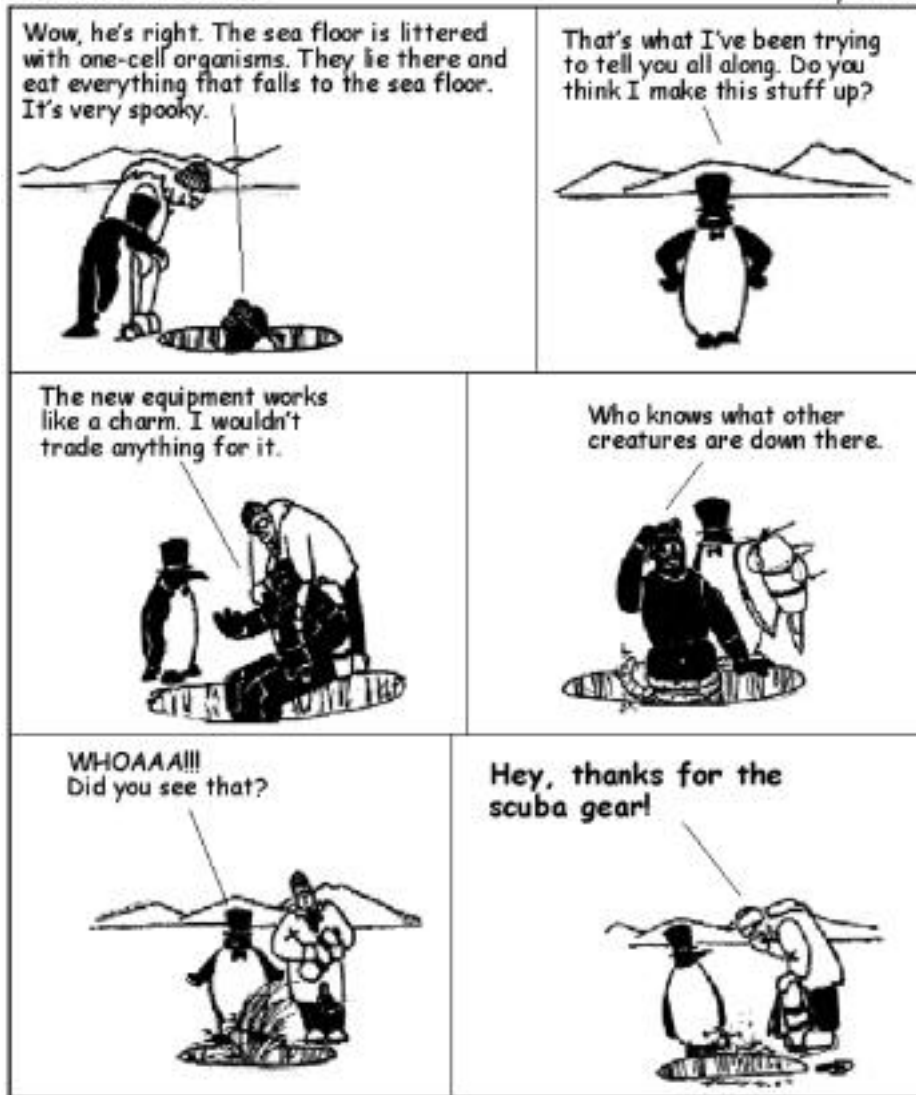
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Dec. 11, 1998: The Spanish phrase of the day is from Luci Cole while walking in the galley for breakfast yesterday morning: "Hay tantas camisas verdes aqui que parece una selva." "There are so many green shirts here that it looks like a forest ." Yes it does. They're arriving like locusts and like locusts you can spot them a mile away. They come to the galley or the bar in droves. With everything around here white, you can't help but spot the green duds anywhere they're at. It's the last year of the Navy here on the continent after many years of service and now the Air National Guard is taking over on the flight duties. That's why there are less Navy personel and multitudes of people from the Air Guard. The Air National Guard flies the LC-130 planes in Greenland, but they're quickly learning this is not Greenland. This place humbles people. It did the early explorers and it does the new ones. With half the season still to go it's looking like an interesting summer. Have a great day.

There's this place in the ocean not far from here named Explorers Cove where researchers found the conditions are the same as in the deep ocean floor.

They discovered that the ocean floor is full of these amazing one-cell organisms that remind me of the Borg from "Star Trek." They have tentacles that come out of these hard shells and envelop anything that falls to the bottom as a food source. Resistance is futile.

Another amazing thing researchers found is that Antarctic waters are a witness to a lot of organisms with gigantism. Who knows what's all down there.

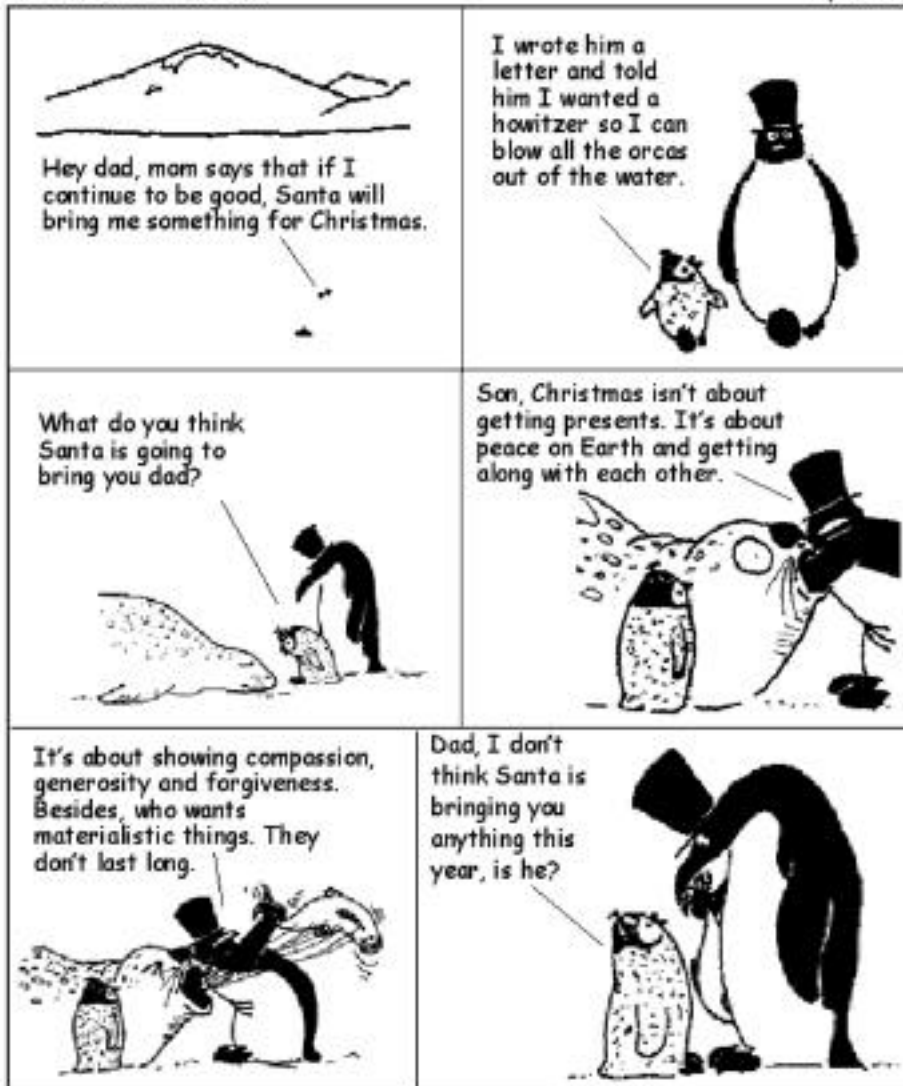


Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Jan. 12, 1998: The Spanish phrase of the day is by me during a moment of amazement while looking at the whales last night: "Hijo, ESE es Un pescado grande!" Which means: "Boy, that's a big fish!" OK, so it's a mammal. To you maybe. To me goats and giraffes are mammals. To me if it has fins and a slick coat then it's a fish. Some people eat worms like fish, but we don't call them fish. We call them "hungry." Or Granola Crunchers. Some fish don't eat worms like fish. I call them "there's a mackerel stuck in my belly and I can't fit anything else inside." We've all heard the old adage "don't judge a book by it's cover." Whale, I'm here to tell you that first impressions do make a difference. Like going on a first date. If you don't wash your armpits and brush your teeth, it could be your last date. So what if you're interesting. As I said before, monkeys are interesting. Would you go out with a chimp? Case closed. Moral to this story: Don't try to fish more than what's out there.



Christmas in Antarctica is a unique experience because you get to see what it would be like without the commercialism ... and in 24-hour daylight. I remember thinking about the people who were personally effected by September 11 and what they where going through this holiday. In the cartoon I wanted to depict how some people do bad things to others believing that what they are doing is actually good.

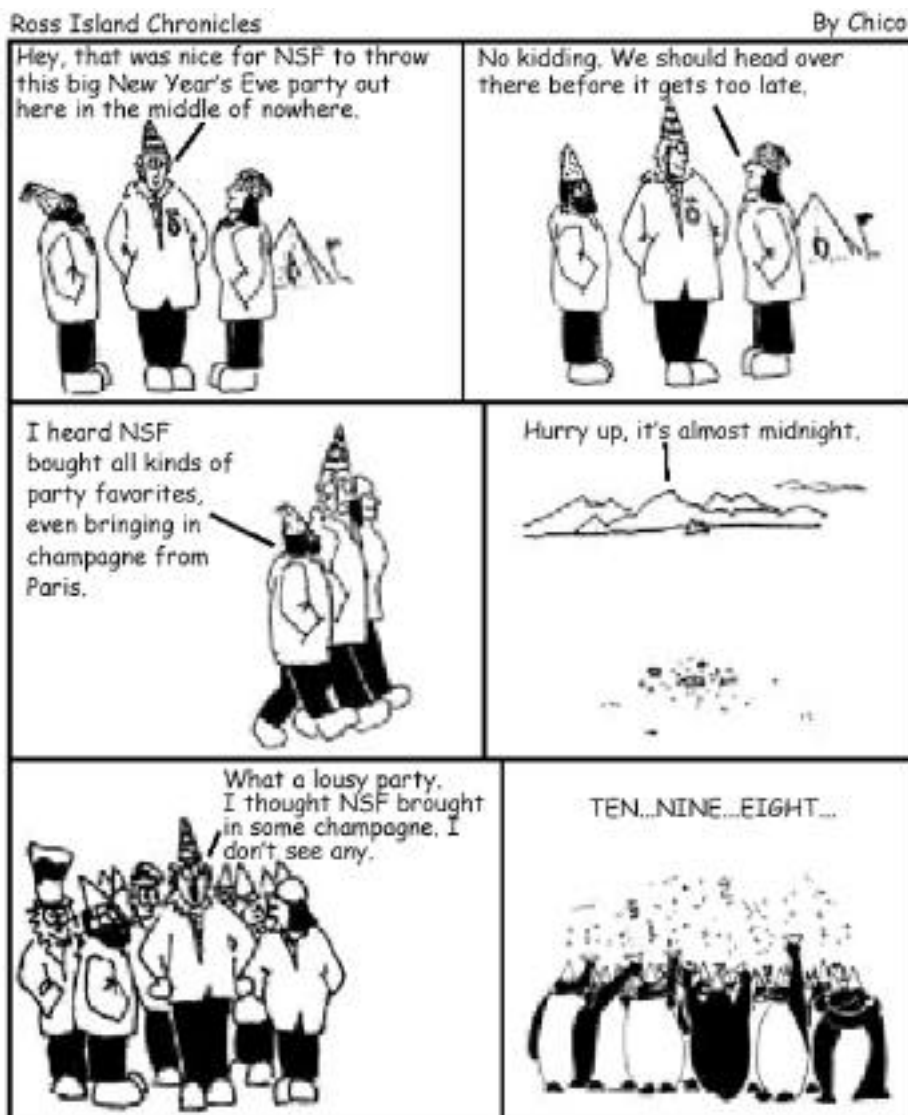
Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Dec. 23, 1998: Today's Spanish phrase of the day is in the spirit of Christmas overheard in the galley yesterday: "No necesitamos esos batos pequenos y el hombre gordo en el saco rojo para celebrar la Navidad, de quedos modos el llegaria en un cravase como el avion en Arriva D." Which means: "We don't need any little green dudes and a fat man in a red coat here to celebrate Christmas, besides if he tries to land here he will probably end up in a crevasse like that plane at Up D." The North Pole is not the South Pole. Here the temperatures are colder because, among other things, Antarctica is land surrounded by water whereas the North Pole is frozen water surrounded by land. Here, though, Santa would be able to see the roof of Medical that just got painted blood red and looks like the Red Roof Inn. The reindeers wouldn't be allowed in Antarctica because of a chance that they could bring in some virus and wipe out the penguins and seal colonies. That's the same reason dogs where x-ed out of this continent, for fear of them bringing distemper.

New Year's Day in Antarctica is one big great party. It didn't take much to figure out that week's cartoon strip.

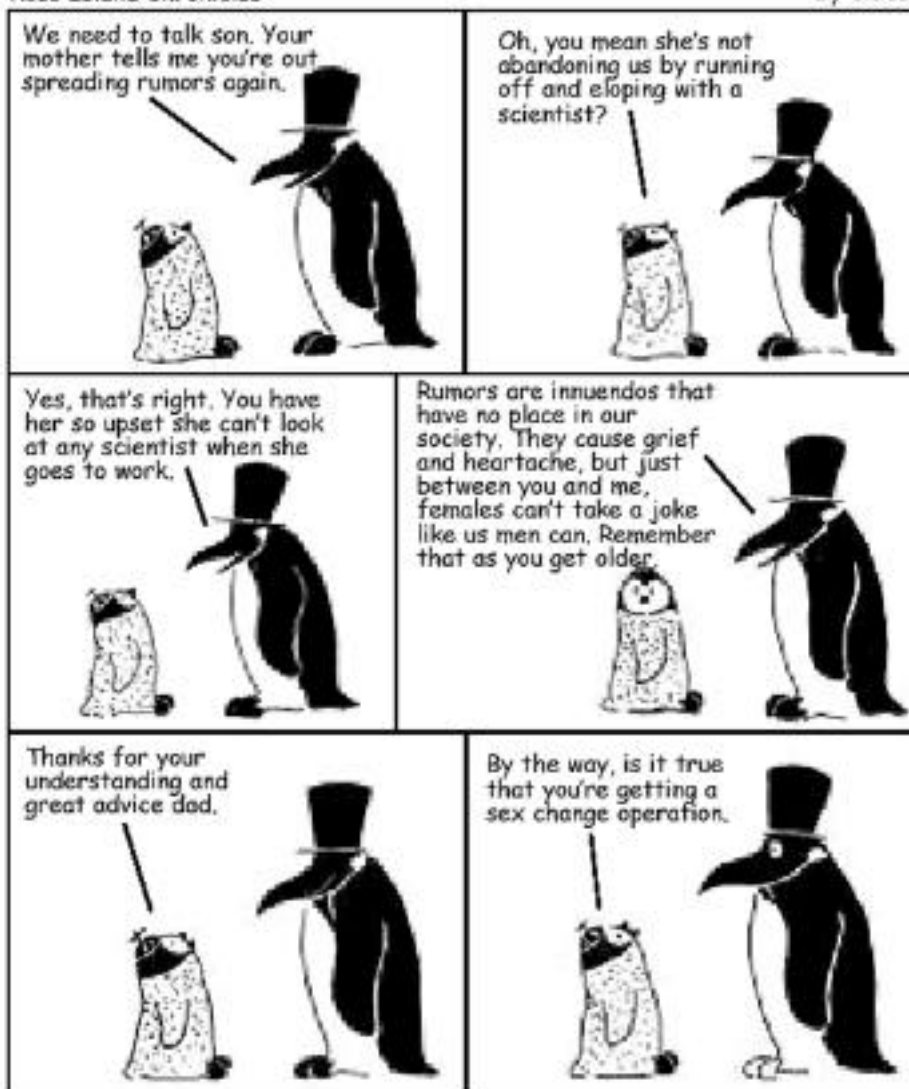


Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Jan. 2, 1999: The Spanish phrase of the day is by someone in the audience at Icestock as they saw "Baby Time" run through the crowd with nothing on but a diaper, bunny boots, a Cat-in-the-Hat seared-like hat, and a torch: "Parece que 1999 va a ser otro ano interesante." "Looks like 1999 is going to be another interesting year." We're halfway through the summer Antarctic season and if it's anything like the end of 1998, the guy who said that is a prophet. Ciao.



Rumors in the United States Antarctic Program are like the wildebeest in Africa. They are everywhere and run rampant. Nothing goes on here that everybody doesn't know about. Most times the last one to know about it is the one who needs to know. When there is nothing to talk rumors are started to keep the conversations going.

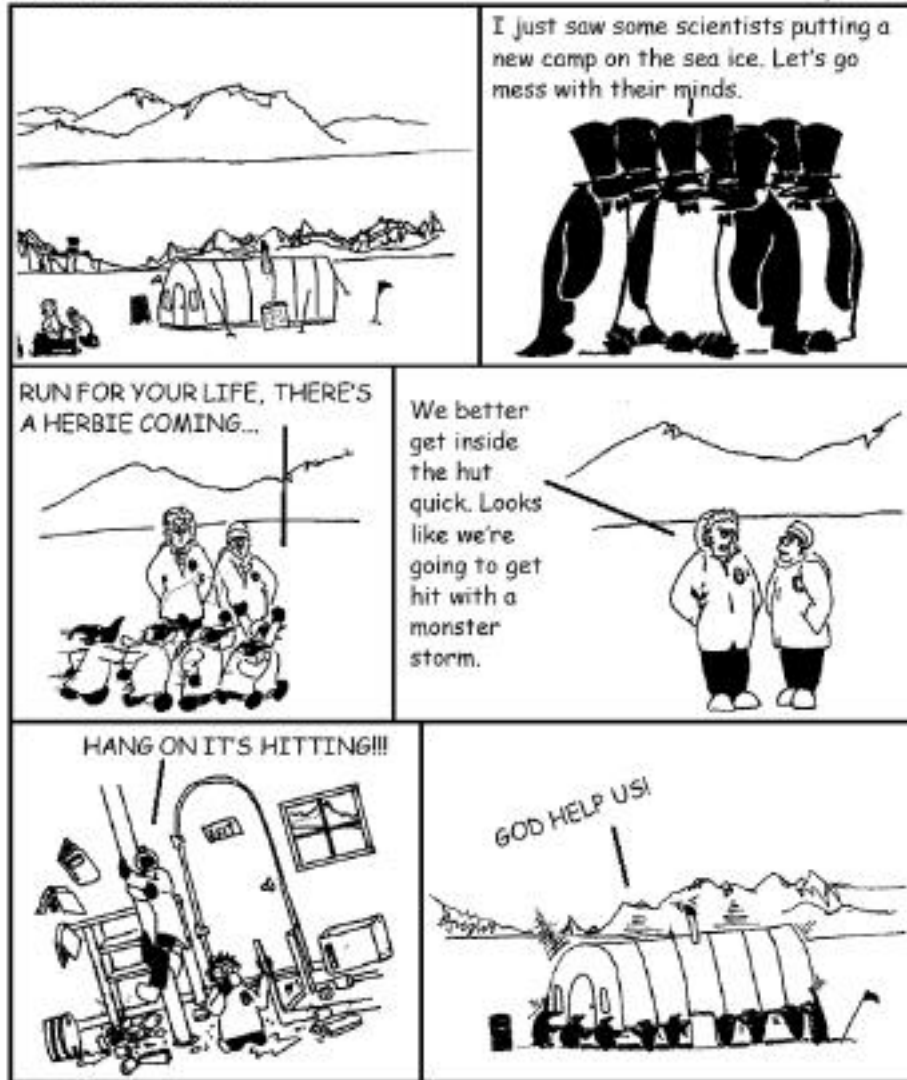
Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Dec. 5, 2000: So the Spanish word of the day is: "Afuera." Which means: "Out." Power went out this morning in McTown where the silence became as deafening as a herd of elephants stampeding through town. It's like that when the power goes out. If you can imagine where you're at and all noise ceasing to exist that's what it sounds like. Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. No mice here so it was even quieter. Or so it seemed until you stepped outside to the orchestration of the backup power generators. This morning the digital clocks were flashing and the emergency lights were on. In the summer when the power goes out at night you can sleep through it. In the winter the temperature starts dropping in the building, racing the thermometer to see who reaches the bottom first. In the winter when the power goes out you get to see what the station looks like if it was in deep space. You look out your window and you see so many stars in the dark heavens that you're left with a profound feeling of just what is out there. This morning the phones are ringing off the hooks and people are scrambling like rats looking for the last piece of cheese. It's Monday in Antarctica ... the adrenalin is flowing and the work for science continues.

I went to New Harbor for a few hours of work and ended up getting stuck with two carpenters because of a storm that hit McMurdo where it grounded all flights. The work we were supposed to do turned into a larger scale after looking at the Jamesway hut sitting on what sea ice was left underneath it and surrounded by water. The warm temperatures caused the sea ice to deteriorate and melt more quickly than normal. Before dismantling it, I quickly drew the hut figuring I would use it for that week's drawing.



Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Jan. 12, 2002: The Spanish word of the day is: "Mentiroso." Which means: "Liar." Liar, liar, your pants are on fire. Sometimes you have to see it to believe it. Like how one area here can get pummeled by high winds and zero visibility while just across eyesight, the air is as calm and quiet as that at a wind tunnel with a power outage. The last few days has seen beautiful weather on station, but across at the Dry Valleys, ice fog and high winds have kept the helicopter pilots from flying to where they want to go. It's take off, maybe we'll get there or maybe we won't. The last few days has seen we won't. Unfortunately, you can't see wind gusts. Look across on some days and you can only see a mean storm eating what's it's engulfing. You expect it to come your way, but it doesn't. Getting stuck out on the field is as common as drinking water. It happens all the time to lots of people. Getting stuck for weeks on end as it can happen at deep field camps where getting in and out can only be done by airplane is a lesson in patience and insanity. And if you think the storms here are big you should see the ones in the winter. They're HUUUUGGGGEEEE. No kidding.



This year two icebreakers came to McMurdo Sound, so I had wanted to do a cartoon depicting an icebreaker. I had also been to Palmer Station on a research vessel this past winter and unlike my first trip there, the trip was uneventful with only a few icebergs in sight. I learned a long time ago here to always have your camera with you because you never know what you might see.

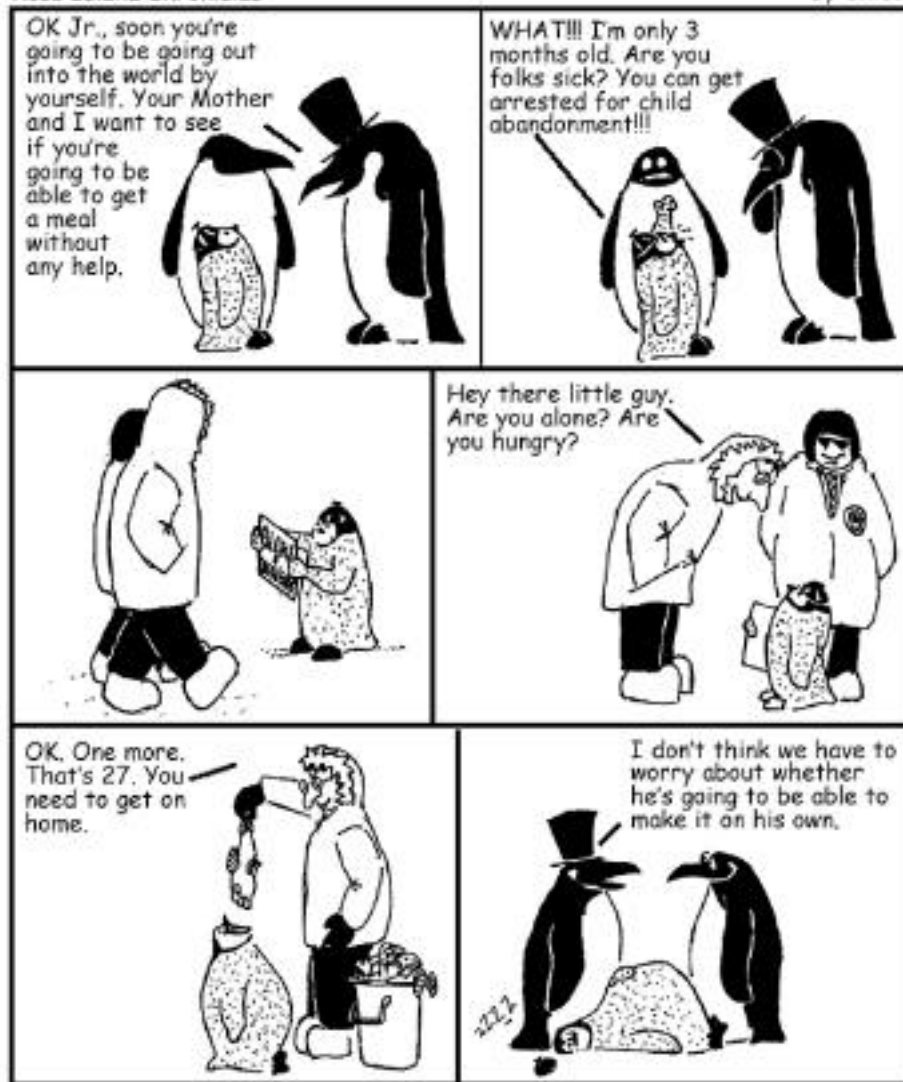
Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



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Dec. 8, 2001: The Spanish word of the day is: "Basura." Which means: "Trash." It doesn't take much to make a natural mixed drink here. A little wind and an open dumpster and you have a cocktail of trash going in all directions. Many times in unison with the people around who zip by in all directions like they usually do trying to get things done. That's why we have here what we call "Daisy Picking." The majorities of the station stops to go outside and try to clean up what the winds have scattered around. Like ants on a mission, station personnel wander around with trash bags in a concerted effort to keep the place from looking like a New York dump ground. If the cities back home did that they wouldn't look so gloomy and decayed half of the time. It's an impressive sight that probably humbles a few people. The truth is everybody wants the place so clean that a rat would feel unwanted. So far we've been lucky. Let's hope it stays that way.

The summer season is coming to a close and I wanted to reflect that. One of the amazing stories is the baby Emperor penguins that leave the colony to go out on their own when they are only a few months old. Humans have it so lucky.

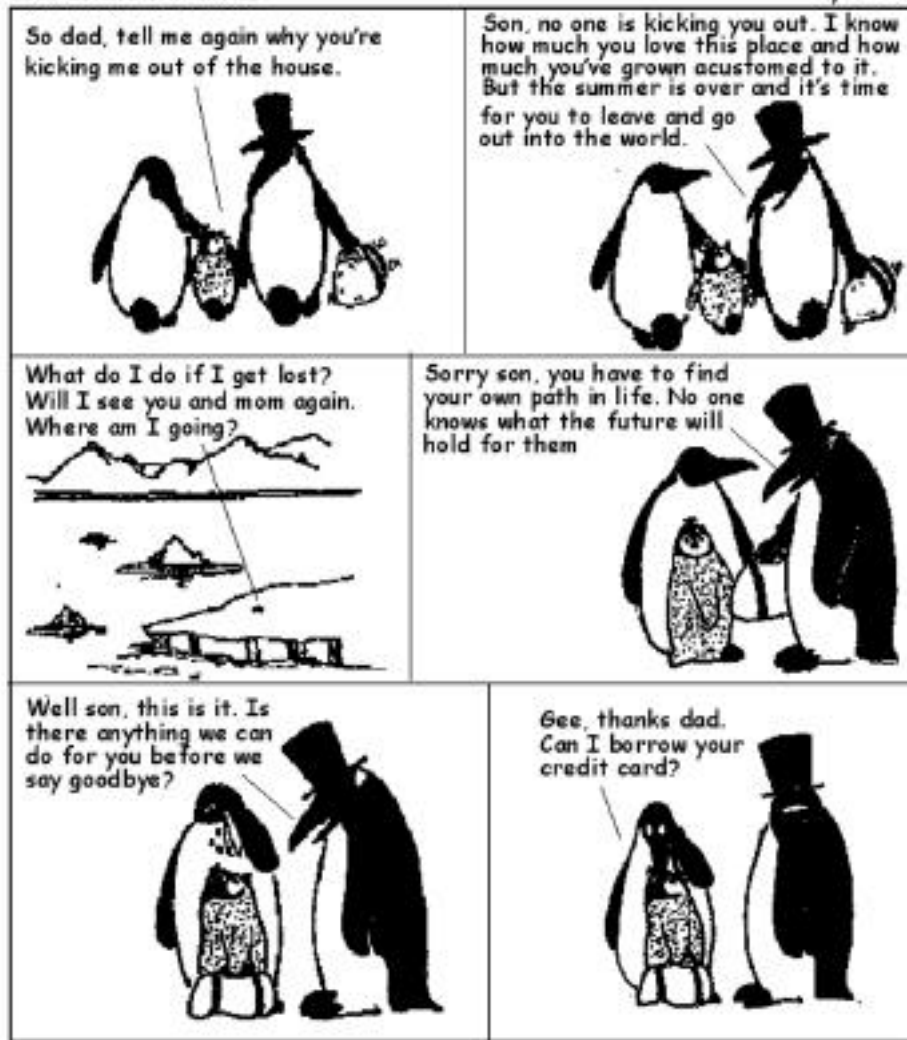


Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



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Nov. 4, 2001: The Spanish phrase of the day is: "Pierde una hora en la mañana y luego te encuentras buscandola todo el dia." Which means: "Lose an hour in the morning and you will spend all day looking for it." It's like that here working in Antarctica. Short on labor, parts and time makes you dig like a badger looking for its mate who got tired of his temper and packed up and left. Once you lose it you never get it back. Weather affects everything and makes everyone scramble for contingency plans. It's typical to go to Plan E around here. People walking when they should be driving, working when they should be resting, and pulling their hair when they should be getting it cut. Sometimes you find the hour you lost only to find out it took three or four to find it. Snow does that. So does more of it. You have to dig deep many times to see what you should be looking at. Stacks of paperwork are like that. With so much to do and look through it's a wonder no one goes blind from all the concentrated staring. The moral to this paragraph on time, hair pulling and deep snow is: If you're going to scream, make sure your eardrums can take it.



The last issue of the paper I wanted to say goodbye. For two reasons: One is that it's the end of the season and coming here has been a wonderful exciting experience and two because one thing I've learned is that you cannot take the future for granted. This might be the last time I come down. I might break a leg, Mt. Erebus might explode, I might for whatever reason not get the opportunity to return. It was a way to say it was great while it lasted in case this is the last time I get the opportunity to come here.

Chico Sez...Spanish Word of the Day



<http://www.vnw.org/southoftheborder/newchico.asp>

Feb. 5, 1998: The Spanish word of the day is: "Equibocado." Which means: "Mixed up." As the season comes to an end you can't help but have mixed feelings about this place. You can't wait to get out, but you also hate to leave. It's like being a 6-year-old and having the chicken pox. You hate being sick, but you love not going to school. The weather this summer took its toll on almost everyone here. And continues to do so. At times we forgot that this is Antarctica and it's supposed to be cold. At times Antarctica forgot that this is supposed to be the summer and be warmer. For those of us who have been here before it was a strange season. It never really got going. Once we finally started getting into sync, we found out it was time to go. The unstable and fast changing weather was probably the main reason of such a hectic season. It caused all kinds of problems for flights and work tasking. And stressed some people out. Yes, it was a pretty strange summer season. But it went well in some ways. No one got killed for one thing. Or seriously maimed. There were no major crashes aside from the usual fender benders. No one got seriously bitten by a seal or a penguin. No one had their nose or fingers fall off because of severe frostbite. There was not much fresh food this year, but then again at least there was food. What does all this mean? Whatever you want it to mean. One things for sure, when we came here, we knew it wasn't Honolulu we were arriving at.



Chico, 39, has worked at all three major U.S. research stations in Antarctica since 1991, including several winters at Palmer and McMurdo. He spent the past season at McMurdo as an insulator/structural welder foreman and safety coordinator for the Facilities, Engineering, Maintenance and Construction department.



He was born in El Paso, Texas, where he lives with his daughter Candice. "I still have the same friends I grew up with," he says. He spends much of his time between seasons on the Ice traveling around the world, including Scotland, Thailand, South America, Indonesia, Australia and Southeast Asia. The rest of the time he hires employees and makes other preparations for upcoming seasons in Antarctica.

"I always knew how to draw as long as I could remember," he says. He has always doodled, but "Ross Island Chronicles" is his first cartoon strip. In his spare time he enjoys "exotic traveling" including hiking, camping, rafting, bicycling and rock climbing.

Last year his daughter, then 18, worked as a painter's helper, reportedly the youngest person deployed in the U.S. Antarctic Program program during the season. Chico says the most profound moment of his life "was seeing her down here as a father and realizing she could go on without me."